RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY CALIFORNIA

B - Yeats
Reveries over childhood and
youth

3

32765

Richmond Public Library
Richmond, California
A fine of 3 cents will be charged for each
day the book is overdue.

DATE DUE

JUL 10 1979
MAY 17 1980
JAN 8 1985
MAY 08 1992
JUL 06 1992
OCT 30 1998
JUL 12 2000

RPL
c-4/75

1900

The picture "Memory Harbour" is the village of Rosses Point, but with the distances shortened and the houses run together as in an old-fashioned panoramic map. The man on the pedestal in the middle of the river is "the metal man," and he points to where the water is deep enough for ships. The coffin, crossbones, skull, and loaf at the point of the headland are to remind one of the sailor who was buried there by a ship's crew in a hurry not to miss the tide. As they were not sure if he was really dead they buried with him a loaf, as the story runs.

W. B. Y.

The picture "Memory Harbour" is the village of Rosses Point, but with the distances shortened and the houses run together as in an old-fashioned panoramic map. The man on the pedestal in the middle of the river is "the metal man," and he points to where the water is deep enough for ships. The coffin, crossbones, skull, and loaf at the point of the headland are to remind one of the sailor who was buried there by a ship's crew in a hurry not to miss the tide. As they were not sure if he was really dead they buried with him a loaf, as the story runs.

W. B. Y.

REVERIES OVER CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH BY WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK MCMXVI

B
YEATS

Copyright, 1916,
By THE MACMILLAN COMPANY.

Set up and electrotyped. Published March, 1916.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

MACMILLAN

To those few people mainly personal friends who have read all that I have written.

W. B. Y.

32765

PREFACE

Sometimes when I remember a relative that I have been fond of, or a strange incident of the past, I wander here and there till I have somebody to talk to. Presently I notice that my listener is bored; but now that I have written it out, I may even begin to forget it all. In any case, because one can always close a book, my friend need not be bored.

I have changed nothing to my knowledge, and yet it must be that I have changed many things without my knowledge, for I am writing after so many years, and have consulted neither friend nor letter nor old newspaper and describe what comes oftenest into my memory.

I say this fearing that some surviving friend of my youth may remember something in a different shape and be offended with my book.

Christmas Day, 1914.

REVERIES OVER CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

Y first memories are fragmentary and isolated and contemporaneous, as though one remembered vaguely some early day of the Seven Days. It seems as if time had not yet been created, for all are connected with emotion and place and without sequence.

I remember sitting upon somebody's knee, looking out of a window at a wall covered with cracked and falling plaster, but what wall I do not remember, and being told that some relation once lived there. I am looking out of another window in London. It is at Fitzroy Road. Some boys are playing in the road and among them a boy in uniform, a telegraph boy perhaps. When I ask who the boy is, a servant tells me that he is going to blow the town up, and I go to sleep in terror.

After that come memories of Sligo, where I live with my grandparents. I am sitting on the ground looking at a mastless toy boat, with the paint rubbed and scratched, and I say to myself in great melancholy, "it is further away than it used to be," and while I am saying it I am looking at a long scratch in the stern, for it is especially the scratch which is

further away. Then one day at dinner my great-uncle William Middleton says, "we should not make light of the troubles of children. They are worse than ours, because we can see the end of our trouble and they can never see any end," and I feel grateful for I know that I am very unhappy and have often said to myself, "when you grow up, never talk as grown-up people do of the happiness of childhood." I may have already had the night of misery when, having prayed for several days that I might die, I had begun to be afraid that I was dying and prayed that I might live. There was no reason for my unhappiness. Nobody was unkind, and my grandmother has still after so many years my gratitude and my reverence. The house was so big that there was always a room to hide in, and I had a red pony and a garden where I could wander, and there were two dogs to follow at my heels, one white with some black spots on his head and the other with long black hair all over him. I used to think about God and fancy that I was very wicked, and one day when I threw a stone and hit a duck in the yard by mischance and broke its wing, I was full of wonder when I was told that the duck would be cooked for dinner and that I should not be punished.

Some of my misery was loneliness and some of it

fear of old William Pollexfen my grandfather. He was never unkind, and I cannot remember that he ever spoke harshly to me, but it was the custom to fear and admire him. He had won the freedom of some Spanish city for saving life, but was so silent that his wife never knew it till he was near eighty, and then from the chance visit of some old sailor. She asked him if it was true and he said it was true, but she knew him too well to question and his old shipmate had left the town. She too had the habit of fear. We knew that he had been in many parts of the world, for there was a great scar on his hand made by a whaling-hook, and in the dining-room was a cabinet with bits of coral in it and a jar of water from the Jordan for the baptising of his children and Chinese pictures upon rice-paper and an ivory walking-stick from India that came to me after his death. He had great physical strength and had the reputation of never ordering a man to do anything he would not do himself. He owned many sailing ships and once, when a captain just come to anchor at Rosses Point reported something wrong with the rudder, had sent a messenger to say "send a man down to find out what's wrong." "The crew all refuse" was the answer. "Go down yourself" was my grandfather's order, and when that was not obeyed, he dived from the main deck, all the neigh-

bourhood lined along the pebbles of the shore. He came up with his skin torn but well informed about the rudder. He had a violent temper and kept a hatchet at his bedside for burglars and would knock a man down instead of going to law, and I once saw him hunt a group of men with a horsewhip. He had no relation for he was an only child, and being solitary and silent, he had few friends. He corresponded with Campbell of Islay who had befriended him and his crew after a shipwreck, and Captain Webb, the first man who had swum the Channel and who was drowned swimming the Niagara Rapids, had been a mate in his employ and became a close friend. That is all the friends I can remember and yet he was so looked up to and admired that when he returned from taking the waters at Bath his men would light bonfires along the railway line for miles, while his partner William Middleton whose father after the great famine had attended the sick for weeks, and taken cholera from a man he carried in his arms into his own house and died of it, and was himself civil to everybody and a cleverer man than my grandfather, came and went without notice. I think I confused my grandfather with God, for I remember in one of my attacks of melancholy praying that he might punish me for my sins, and I was shocked and astonished when a dar-

ing little girl — a cousin I think — having waited under a group of trees in the avenue, where she knew he would pass near four o'clock on the way to his dinner, said to him, "if I were you and you were a little girl, I would give you a doll."

Yet for all my admiration and alarm, neither I nor anyone else thought it wrong to outwit his violence or his rigour ; and his lack of suspicion and a certain helplessness made that easy while it stirred our affection. When I must have been still a very little boy, seven or eight years old perhaps, an uncle called me out of bed one night, to ride the five or six miles to Rosses Point to borrow a railway-pass from a cousin. My grandfather had one, but thought it dishonest to let another use it, but the cousin was not so particular. I was let out through a gate that opened upon a little lane beside the garden away from ear-shot of the house, and rode delighted through the moonlight, and awoke my cousin in the small hours by tapping on his window with a whip. I was home again by two or three in the morning and found the coachman waiting in the little lane. My grandfather would not have thought such an adventure possible, for every night at eight he believed that the stable-yard was locked, and he knew that he was brought the key. Some servant had once got into trouble at night and so he had

arranged that they should all be locked in. He never knew, what everybody else in the house knew, that for all the ceremonious bringing of the key the gate was never locked.

Even to-day when I read "King Lear" his image is always before me and I often wonder if the delight in passionate men in my plays and in my poetry is more than his memory. He must have been ignorant, though I could not judge him in my childhood, for he had run away to sea when a boy, "gone to sea through the hawse-hole" as he phrased it, and I can but remember him with two books — his Bible and Falconer's "Shipwreck," a little green-covered book that lay always upon his table ; he belonged to some younger branch of an old Cornish family. His father had been in the Army, had retired to become an owner of sailing ships, and an engraving of some old family place my grandfather thought should have been his hung next a painted coat of arms in the little back parlour. His mother had been a Wexford woman, and there was a tradition that his family had been linked with Ireland for generations and once had their share in the old Spanish trade with Galway. He had a good deal of pride and disliked his neighbours, whereas his wife, a Middleton, was gentle and patient and did many charities in the little back parlour among

frieze coats and shawled heads, and every night when she saw him asleep went the round of the house alone with a candle to make certain there was no burglar in danger of the hatchet. She was a true lover of her garden and before the care of her house had grown upon her, would choose some favourite among her flowers and copy it upon rice-paper. I saw some of her handiwork the other day and I wondered at the delicacy of form and colour and at a handling that may have needed a magnifying glass it was so minute. I can remember no other pictures but the Chinese paintings, and some coloured prints of battles in the Crimea upon the wall of a passage, and the painting of a ship at the passage end darkened by time.

My grown-up uncles and aunts, my grandfather's many sons and daughters, came and went, and almost all they said or did has faded from my memory, except a few harsh words that convince me by a vividness out of proportion to their harshness that all were habitually kind and considerate. The youngest of my uncles was stout and humorous and had a tongue of leather over the keyhole of his door to keep the draught out, and another whose bedroom was at the end of a long stone passage had a model turret ship in a glass case. He was a clever man and had designed the Sligo quays, but was now

going mad and inventing a vessel of war that could not be sunk, his pamphlet explained, because of a hull of solid wood. Only six months ago my sister awoke dreaming that she held a wingless sea-bird in her arms and presently she heard that he had died in his mad-house, for a sea-bird is the omen that announces the death or danger of a Pollexfen. An uncle, George Pollexfen, afterwards astrologer and mystic, and my dear friend, came but seldom from Ballina, once to a race meeting with two postillions dressed in green; and there was that younger uncle who had sent me for the railway-pass. He was my grandmother's favourite, and had, the servants told me, been sent away from school for taking a crowbar to a bully.

I can only remember my grandmother punishing me once. I was playing in the kitchen and a servant in horseplay pulled my shirt out of my trousers in front just as my grandmother came in and I, accused of I knew not what childish indecency, was given my dinner in a room by myself. But I was always afraid of my uncles and aunts, and once the uncle who had taken the crowbar to the bully found me eating lunch which my grandmother had given me and reproved me for it and made me ashamed. We breakfasted at nine and dined at four and it was considered self-indulgent to eat anything between

meals; and once an aunt told me that I had reined in my pony and struck it at the same moment that I might show it off as I rode through the town, and I, because I had been accused of what I thought a very dark crime, had a night of misery. Indeed I remember little of childhood but its pain. I have grown happier with every year of life as though gradually conquering something in myself, for certainly my miseries were not made by others but were a part of my own mind.

II

One day someone spoke to me of the voice of the conscience, and as I brooded over the phrase I came to think that my soul, because I did not hear an articulate voice, was lost. I had some wretched days until being alone with one of my aunts I heard a whisper in my ear, "what a tease you are!" At first I thought my aunt must have spoken, but when I found she had not, I concluded it was the voice of my conscience and was happy again. From that day the voice has come to me at moments of crisis, but now it is a voice in my head that is sudden and startling. It does not tell me what to do, but often reproves me. It will say perhaps, "that is unjust" of some thought; and once when I complained that a prayer had not been heard, it said, "you have

been helped." I had a little flagstaff in front of the house and a red flag with the Union Jack in the corner. Every night I pulled my flag down and folded it up and laid it on a shelf in my bedroom, and one morning before breakfast I found it, though I knew I had folded it up the night before, knotted round the bottom of the flagstaff so that it was touching the grass. I must have heard the servants talking of the faeries for I concluded at once that a faery had tied those four knots and from that on believed that one had whispered in my ear. I have been told, though I do not remember it myself, that I saw, whether once or many times I do not know, a supernatural bird in the corner of the room. Once too I was driving with my grandmother a little after dark close to the Channel that runs for some five miles from Sligo to the sea, and my grandmother showed me the red light of an outward-bound steamer and told me that my grandfather was on board, and that night in my sleep I screamed out and described the steamer's wreck. The next morning my grandfather arrived on a blind horse found for him by grateful passengers. He had, as I remember the story, been asleep when the captain aroused him to say they were going on the rocks. He said, "have you tried sail on her?" and judging from some answer that the captain was

demoralised took over the command and, when the ship could not be saved, got the crew and passengers into the boats. His own boat was upset and he saved himself and some others by swimming ; some women had drifted ashore, buoyed up by their crinolines. "I was not so much afraid of the sea as of that terrible man with his oar," was the comment of a schoolmaster who was among the survivors. Eight men were, however, drowned and my grandfather suffered from that memory at intervals all his life, and if asked to read family prayers never read anything but the shipwreck of St. Paul.

I remember the dogs more clearly than anyone except my grandfather and grandmother. The black hairy one had no tail because it had been sliced off, if I was told the truth, by a railway train. I think I followed at their heels more than they did at mine, and that their journeys ended at a rabbit-warren behind the garden ; and sometimes they had savage fights, the black hairy dog, being well protected by its hair, suffering least. I can remember one so savage that the white dog would not take his teeth out of the black dog's hair till the coachman hung them over the side of a water-butt, one outside and one in the water. My grandmother once told the coachman to cut the hair like a lion's hair and, after a long consultation with the stable-boy, he cut it all

over the head and shoulders and left it on the lower part of the body. The dog disappeared for a few days and I did not doubt that its heart was broken. There was a large garden behind the house full of apple-trees with flower-beds and grass-plots in the centre and two figure-heads of ships, one among the strawberry plants under a wall covered with fruit trees and one among the flowers. The one among the flowers was a white lady in flowing robes, while the other, a stalwart man in uniform, had been taken from a three-masted ship of my grandfather's called "The Russia," and there was a belief among the servants that the stalwart man represented the Tsar and had been presented by the Tsar himself. The avenue, or as they say in England the drive, that went from the hall door through a clump of big trees to an insignificant gate and a road bordered by broken and dirty cottages, was but two or three hundred yards, and I often thought it should have been made to wind more, for I judged people's social importance mainly by the length of their avenues. This idea may have come from the stable-boy, for he was my principal friend. He had a book of Orange rhymes, and the days when we read them together in the hay-loft gave me the pleasure of rhyme for the first time. Later on I can remember being told, when there

was a rumour of a Fenian rising, that rifles had been served out to the Orangemen and presently, when I had begun to dream of my future life, I thought I would like to die fighting the Fenians. I was to build a very fast and beautiful ship and to have under my command a company of young men who were always to be in training like athletes and so become as brave and handsome as the young men in the story-books, and there was to be a big battle on the sea-shore near Rosses and I was to be killed. I collected little pieces of wood and piled them up in a corner of the yard, and there was an old rotten log in a distant field I often went to look at because I thought it would go a long way in the making of the ship. All my dreams were of ships; and one day a sea captain who had come to dine with my grandfather put a hand on each side of my head and lifted me up to show me Africa, and another day a sea captain pointed to the smoke from the Pern mill on the quays rising up beyond the trees of the lawn, as though it came from the mountain, and asked me if Ben Bulben was a burning mountain.

Once every few months I used to go to Rosses Point or Ballisodare to see another little boy, who had a piebald pony that had once been in a circus and sometimes forgot where it was and went round

and round. He was George Middleton, son of my great-uncle William Middleton. Old Middleton had bought land, then believed a safe investment, at Ballisodare and at Rosses, and spent the winter at Ballisodare and the summer at Rosses. The Middleton and Pollexfen flour mills were at Ballisodare, and a great salmon weir, rapids and a waterfall, but it was more often at Rosses that I saw my cousin. We rowed in the river mouth or were taken sailing in a heavy slow schooner yacht or in a big ship's boat that had been rigged and decked. There were great cellars under the house, for it had been a smuggler's house a hundred years before, and sometimes three loud raps would come upon the drawing room window at sun-down, setting all the dogs barking, some dead smuggler giving his accustomed signal. One night I heard them very distinctly and my cousins often heard them, and later on my sister. A pilot had told me that, after dreaming three times of a treasure buried in my uncle's garden, he had climbed the wall in the middle of the night and begun to dig but grew disheartened "because there was so much earth." I told somebody what he had said and was told that it was well he did not find it for it was guarded by a spirit that looked like a flat iron. At Ballisodare there was a cleft among the rocks that I passed with terror because I believed

that a murderous monster lived there that made a buzzing sound like a bee.

It was through the Middletons perhaps that I got my interest in country stories and certainly the first faery stories that I heard were in the cottages about their houses. The Middletons took the nearest for friends and were always in and out of the cottages of pilots and of tenants. They were practical, always doing something with their hands, making boats, feeding chickens, and without ambition. One of them had designed a steamer many years before my birth and long after I had grown to manhood one could hear it — it had some sort of obsolete engine — many miles off wheezing in the Channel like an asthmatic person. It had been built on the lake and dragged through the town by many horses, stopping before the windows where my mother was learning her lessons, and plunging the whole school into candle-light for five days, and was still patched and repatched mainly because it was believed to be a bringer of good luck. It had been called after the betrothed of its builder "Janet," long corrupted into the more familiar "Jennet," and the betrothed died in my youth having passed her eightieth year and been her husband's plague because of the violence of her temper. Another who was but a year or two older than

myself used to shock me by running after hens to know by their feel if they were on the point of dropping an egg. They let their houses decay and the glass fall from the windows of their greenhouses, but one among them at any rate had the second sight. They were liked but had not the pride and reserve, the sense of decorum and order, the instinctive playing before themselves that belongs to those who strike the popular imagination.

Sometimes my grandmother would bring me to see some old Sligo gentlewoman whose garden ran down to the river, ending there in a low wall full of wallflowers, and I would sit up upon my chair, very bored, while my elders ate their seed-cake and drank their sherry. My walks with the servants were more interesting; sometimes we would pass a little fat girl and a servant persuaded me to write her a love-letter, and the next time she passed she put her tongue out. But it was the servant's stories that interested me. At such and such a corner a man had got a shilling from a drill sergeant by standing in a barrel and had then rolled out of it and shown his crippled legs. And in such and such a house an old woman had hid herself under the bed of her guests, an officer and his wife, and on hearing them abuse her, beaten them with a broomstick. All the well-known families had their

grotesque or tragic or romantic legends, and I often said to myself how terrible it would be to go away and die where nobody would know my story. Years afterwards, when I was ten or twelve years old and in London, I would remember Sligo with tears, and when I began to write, it was there I hoped to find my audience. Next to Merville where I lived, was another tree-surrounded house where I sometimes went to see a little boy who stayed there occasionally with his grandmother, whose name I forget and who seemed to me kind and friendly, though when I went to see her in my thirteenth or fourteenth year I discovered that she only cared for very little boys. When the visitors called I hid in the hay-loft and lay hidden behind the great heap of hay while a servant was calling my name in the yard.

I do not know how old I was (for all these events seem at the same distance) when I was made drunk. I had been out yachting with an uncle and my cousins and it had come on very rough. I had lain on deck between the mast and the bowsprit and a wave had burst over me and I had seen green water over my head. I was very proud and very wet. When we got into Rosses again, I was dressed up in an older boy's clothes so that the trousers came down below my boots and a pilot gave me a little raw whiskey. I drove home with the uncle on an

outside car and was so pleased with the strange state in which I found myself that for all my uncle could do, I cried to every passer-by that I was drunk, and went on crying it through the town and everywhere until I was put to bed by my grandmother and given something to drink that tasted of black currants and so fell asleep.

III

Some six miles off towards Ben Bulben and beyond the Channel, as we call the tidal river between Sligo and the Rosses, and on top of a hill there was a little square two-storeyed house covered with creepers and looking out upon a garden where the box borders were larger than any I had ever seen, and where I saw for the first time the crimson streak of the gladiolus and awaited its blossom with excitement. Under one gable a dark thicket of small trees made a shut-in mysterious place, where one played and believed that something was going to happen. My great-aunt Micky lived there. Micky was not her right name for she was Mary Yeats and her father had been my great-grandfather, John Yeats, who had been Rector of Drumcliffe, a few miles further off, and died in 1847. She was a spare, high-coloured, elderly woman and had the oldest looking cat I had ever seen, for its hair

had grown into matted locks of yellowy white. She farmed and had one old man-servant, but could not have farmed at all, had not neighbouring farmers helped to gather in the crops, in return for the loan of her farm implements and "out of respect for the family," for as Johnny MacGurk, the Sligo barber said to me, "the Yeats's were always very respectable." She was full of family history; all her dinner knives were pointed like daggers through much cleaning, and there was a little James the First cream-jug with the Yeats motto and crest, and on her dining-room mantle-piece a beautiful silver cup that had belonged to my great-great-grandfather, who had married a certain Mary Butler. It had upon it the Butler crest and had been already old at the date 1534, when the initials of some bride and bridegroom were engraved under the lip. All its history for generations was rolled up inside it upon a piece of paper yellow with age, until some caller took the paper to light his pipe. Another family of Yeats, a widow and her two children on whom I called sometimes with my grandmother, lived near in a long low cottage, and owned a very fierce turkeycock that did battle with their visitors; and some miles away lived the secretary to the Grand Jury and Land Agent, my great-uncle Mat Yeats and his big family of boys and

girls; but I think it was only in later years that I came to know them well. I do not think any of these liked the Pollexfens, who were well off and seemed to them purse-proud, whereas they themselves had come down in the world. I remember them as very well-bred and very religious in the Evangelical way and thinking a good deal of Aunt Micky's old histories. There had been among our ancestors a Kings County soldier, one of Marlborough's generals, and when his nephew came to dine he gave him boiled pork, and when the nephew said he disliked boiled pork he had asked him to dine again and promised him something he would like better. However, he gave him boiled pork again and the nephew took the hint in silence. The other day as I was coming home from America, I met one of his descendants whose family has not another discoverable link with ours, and he too knew the boiled pork story and nothing else. We have the General's portrait, and he looks very fine in his armour and his long curly wig, and underneath it, after his name, are many honours that have left no tradition among us. Were we country people, we could have summarised his life in a legend.

Another ancestor or great-uncle had chased the United Irishmen for a fortnight, fallen into their

hands and been hanged, and the notorious Major Sirr who betrayed the brothers Shears, taking their children upon his knees to question them, if the tale does not lie, had been god-father to several of my great-great-grandfather's children; while to make a balance, my great-grandfather had been Robert Emmett's friend and been suspected and imprisoned though but for a few hours. A great-uncle had been Governor of Penang, and led the forlorn hope at the taking of Rangoon, and an uncle of a still older generation had fallen at New Orleans in 1813, and even in the last generation there had been lives of some power and pleasure. An old man who had entertained many famous people, in his 18th century house, where battlement and tower showed the influence of Horace Walpole, had but lately, after losing all his money, drowned himself, first taking off his rings and chain and watch as became a collector of many beautiful things; and once to remind us of more passionate life, a gun-boat put into Rosses, commanded by the illegitimate son of some great-uncle or other. Now that I can look at their miniatures, turning them over to find the name of soldier, or lawyer, or Castle official, and wondering if they cared for good books or good music, I am delighted with all that joins my life to those who had power in Ireland or with those any-

where that were good servants and poor bargainers, but I cared nothing as a child for Micky's tales. I could see my grandfather's ships come up the bay or the river, and his sailors treated me with deference, and a ship's carpenter made and mended my toy boats and I thought that nobody could be so important as my grandfather. Perhaps, too, it is only now that I can value those more gentle natures so unlike his passion and violence. An old Sligo priest has told me how my great-grandfather John Yeats always went into his kitchen rattling the keys, so much did he fear finding some one doing wrong, and how when the agent of the great landowner of his parish brought him from cottage to cottage to bid the women send their children to the Protestant school and all had promised till they came to one who cried, "child of mine will never darken your door," he had said "thank you, my woman, you are the first honest woman I have met today." My uncle, Mat Yeats, the Land Agent, had once waited up every night for a week to catch some boys who stole his apples and when he caught them had given them sixpence and told them not to do it again. Perhaps it is only fancy or the softening touch of the miniaturist that makes me discover in their faces some courtesy and much gentleness. Two 18th century faces interest me the most, one

that of a great-great-grandfather, for both have under their powdered curling wigs a half-feminine charm, and as I look at them I discover a something clumsy and heavy in myself. Yet it was a Yeats who spoke the only eulogy that turns my head. "We have ideas and no passions, but by marriage with a Pollexfen we have given a tongue to the sea cliffs."

Among the miniatures there is a larger picture, an admirable drawing by I know not what master, that is too harsh and merry for its company. He was a connection and close friend of my great-grandmother Corbet, and though we spoke of him as "Uncle Beattie" in our childhood, no blood relation. My great-grandmother who died at ninety-three had many memories of him. He was the friend of Goldsmith & was accustomed to boast, clergyman though he was, that he belonged to a hunt-club of which every member but himself had been hanged or transported for treason, and that it was not possible to ask him a question he could not reply to with a perfectly appropriate blasphemy or indecency.

IV

Because I had found it hard to attend to anything less interesting than my thoughts, I was difficult to

teach. Several of my uncles and aunts had tried to teach me to read, and because they could not, and because I was much older than children who read easily, had come to think, as I have learnt since, that I had not all my faculties. But for an accident they might have thought it for a long time. My father was staying in the house and never went to church, and that gave me the courage to refuse to set out one Sunday morning. I was often devout, my eyes filling with tears at the thought of God and of my own sins, but I hated church. My grandmother tried to teach me to put my toes first to the ground because I suppose I stumped on my heels and that took my pleasure out of the way there. Later on when I had learnt to read I took pleasure in the words of the hymn, but never understood why the choir took three times as long as I did in getting to the end; and the part of the service I liked, the sermon and passages of the Apocalypse and Ecclesiastes, were no compensation for all the repetitions and for the fatigue of so much standing. My father said if I would not go to church he would teach me to read. I think now that he wanted to make me go for my grandmother's sake and could think of no other way. He was an angry and impatient teacher and flung the reading book at my head, and next Sunday I decided to go to church.

My father had, however, got interested in teaching me, and only shifted the lesson to a week-day till he had conquered my wandering mind. My first clear image of him was fixed on my imagination, I believe, but a few days before the first lesson. He had just arrived from London and was walking up and down the nursery floor. He had a very black beard and hair, and one cheek bulged out with a fig that was there to draw the pain out of a bad tooth. One of the nurses (a nurse had come from London with my brothers and sisters) said to the other that a live frog, she had heard, was best of all. Then I was sent to a dame school kept by an old woman who stood us in rows and had a long stick like a billiard cue to get at the back rows. My father was still at Sligo when I came back from my first lesson and asked me what I had been taught. I said I had been taught to sing, and he said, "sing then" and I sang

"Little drops of water,
Little grains of sand,
Make the mighty ocean,
And the pleasant land"

high up in my head. So my father wrote to the old woman that I was never to be taught to sing again, and afterwards other teachers were told the same

thing. Presently my eldest sister came on a long visit and she and I went to a little two-storeyed house in a poor street where an old gentlewoman taught us spelling and grammar. When we had learned our lesson well, we were allowed to look at a sword presented to her father who had led troops in India or China and to spell out a long complimentary inscription on the silver scabbard. As we walked to her house or home again we held a large umbrella before us, both gripping the handle and guiding ourselves by looking out of a round hole gnawed in the cover by a mouse. When I had got beyond books of one syllable, I began to spend my time in a room called the Library, though there were no books in it that I can remember except some old novels I never opened and a many volumed encyclopaedia published towards the end of the 18th century. I read this encyclopaedia a great deal and can remember a long passage considering whether fossil wood despite its appearance might not be only a curiously shaped stone.

My father's unbelief had set me thinking about the evidences of religion and I weighed the matter perpetually with great anxiety, for I did not think I could live without religion. All my religious emotions were, I think, connected with clouds and cloudy glimpses of luminous sky, perhaps because

of some bible picture of God's speaking to Abraham or the like. At least I can remember the sight moving me to tears. One day I got a decisive argument for belief. A cow was about to calve, and I went to the field where the cow was with some farm-hands who carried a lantern, and next day I heard that the cow had calved in the early morning. I asked everybody how calves were born, and because nobody would tell me, made up my mind that nobody knew. They were the gift of God, that much was certain, but it was plain that nobody had ever dared to see them come, and children must come in the same way. I made up my mind that when I was a man I would wait up till calf or child had come. I was certain there would be a cloud and a burst of light and God would bring the calf in the cloud out of the light. That thought made me content until a boy of twelve or thirteen, who had come on a visit for the day, sat beside me in a hay-loft and explained all the mechanism of sex. He had learnt all about it from an elder boy whose pathic he was (to use a term he would not have understood) and his description, given, as I can see now, as if he were telling of any other fact of physical life, made me miserable for weeks. After the first impression wore off, I began to doubt if he had spoken truth, but one day I discovered a passage in the encyclopaedia, though I

only partly understood its long words, that confirmed what he had said. I did not know enough to be shocked at his relation to the elder boy, but it was the first breaking of the dream of childhood.
My realization of death came when my father and mother and my two brothers and my two sisters were on a visit. I was in the Library when I heard feet running past and heard somebody say in the passage that my younger brother, Robert, had died. He had been ill for some days. A little later my sister and I sat at the table, very happy, drawing ships with their flags half-mast high. We must have heard or seen that the ships in the harbour had their flags at half-mast. Next day at breakfast I heard people telling how my mother and the servant had heard the banshee crying the night before he died. It must have been after this that I told my grandmother I did not want to go with her when she went to see old bed-ridden people because they would soon die.

V

At length when I was eight or nine an aunt said to me, "you are going to London. Here you are somebody. There you will be nobody at all." I knew at the time that her words were a blow at my father, not at me, but it was some years before I knew her reason. She thought so able a man as my father

could have found out some way of painting more popular pictures if he had set his mind to it and that it was wrong of him "to spend every evening at his club." She had mistaken, for what she would have considered a place of wantonness, Heatherley's Art School.

My mother and brother and sister were at Sligo perhaps when I was sent to England, for my father and I and a group of landscape painters lodged at Burnham Beeches with an old Mr. and Mrs. Earle. My father was painting the first big pond you come to if you have driven from Slough through Farnham Royal. He began it in spring and painted all through the year, the picture changing with the seasons, and gave it up unfinished when he had painted the snow upon the heath-covered banks. He is never satisfied and can never make himself say that any picture is finished. In the evening he heard me my lessons or read me some novel of Fenimore Cooper's. I found delightful adventures in the woods — one day a blind worm and an adder fighting in a green hollow, and sometimes Mrs. Earle would be afraid to tidy the room because I had put a bottle full of newts on the mantle-piece. Now and then a boy from a farm on the other side of the road threw a pebble at my window at daybreak, and he and I went fishing in the big second

pond. Now and then another farmer's boy and I shot sparrows with an old pepper box revolver and the boy would roast them on a string. There was an old horse one of the painters called the scaffolding, and sometimes a son of old Earle's drove with me to Slough and once to Windsor, and at Windsor we made our lunch of cold sausages bought from a public house. I did not know what it was to be alone, for I could wander in pleasant alarm through the enclosed parts, then very large, or round some pond imagining ships going in and out among the reeds and thinking of Sligo or of strange seafaring adventures in the fine ship I should launch when I grew up. I had always a lesson to learn before night and that was a continual misery, for I could very rarely, with so much to remember, set my thoughts upon it and then only in fear. One day my father told me that a painter had said I was very thick-skinned and did not mind what was said to me, and I could not understand how anybody could be so unjust. It made me wretched to be idle but one could not help it. I was once surprised and shocked. All but my father and myself had been to London, and Kennedy and Farrar and Page, I remember the names vaguely, arrived laughing and talking. One of them had carried off a card of texts from the waiting room of the station and hung it up on the

wall. I thought "he has stolen it," but my father and all made it a theme of merry conversation. Then I returned to Sligo for a few weeks as I was to do once or twice in every year for years, and after that we settled in London. Perhaps my mother and the other children had been there all the time, for I remember my father now and again going to London. The first house we lived in was close to Burne Jones's house at North End, but we moved after a year or two to Bedford Park. At North End we had a pear tree in the garden and plenty of pears, but the pears used to be full of maggots, and almost opposite lived a school-master called O'Neill, and when a little boy told me that the school-master's great-grandfather had been a king I did not doubt it. I was sitting against the hedge and iron railing of some villa-garden there, when I heard one boy say to another it was something wrong with my liver that gave me such a dark complexion and that I could not live more than a year. I said to myself a year is a very long time, one can do such a lot of things in a year, and put it out of my head. When my father gave me a holiday and later when I had a holiday from school I took my schooner boat to the round pond, sailing it very commonly against the two cutter yachts of an old naval officer. He would sometimes look at the ducks and say, "I

would like to take that fellow home for my dinner," and he sang me a sailor's song about a coffin ship which left Sligo after the great famine, that made me feel very important. The servants at Sligo had told me the story. When she was moved from the berth she had lain in, an unknown dead man's body had floated up, a very evil omen; and my grandfather, who was Lloyds' agent, had condemned her, but she slipped out in the night. The pond had its own legends; and a boy who had seen a certain model steamer "burned to the water's edge" was greatly valued as a friend. There was a little boy I was kind to because I knew his father had done something disgraceful, though I did not know what. It was years before I discovered that his father was but the maker of certain popular statues, many of which are now in public places. I had heard my father's friends speak of him. Sometimes my sister came with me, and we would look into all the sweet shops & toy shops on our way home, especially into one opposite Holland House because there was a cutter yacht made of sugar in the window, and we drank at all the fountains. Once a stranger spoke to us and bought us sweets and came with us almost to our door. We asked him to come in and told him our father's name. He would not come in, but laughed and said, "Oh, that is the painter who

Mrs Yeats
from a drawing by J. B. Yeats made in 1867

scrapes out every day what he painted the day before." A poignant memory came upon me the other day while I was passing the drinking-fountain near Holland Park, for there I and my sister had spoken together of our longing for Sligo and our hatred of London. I know we were both very close to tears and remember with wonder, for I had never known anyone that cared for such momentoes, that I longed for a sod of earth from some field I knew, something of Sligo to hold in my hand. It was some old race instinct like that of a savage, for we had been brought up to laugh at all display of emotion. Yet it was our mother, who would have thought its display a vulgarity, who kept alive that love. She would spend hours listening to stories or telling stories of the pilots and fishing people of Rosses Point, or of her own Sligo girlhood, and it was always assumed between her and us that Sligo was more beautiful than other places. I can see now that she had great depth of feeling, that she was her father's daughter. My memory of what she was like in those days has grown very dim, but I think her sense of personality, her desire of any life of her own, had disappeared in her care for us and in much anxiety about money. I always see her sewing or knitting in spectacles and wearing some plain dress. Yet ten years ago when I was in San Francisco,

an old cripple came to see me who had left Sligo before her marriage; he came to tell me, he said, that my mother "had been the most beautiful girl in Sligo."

The only lessons I had ever learned were those my father taught me, for he terrified me by descriptions of my moral degradation and he humiliated me by my likeness to disagreeable people; but presently I was sent to school at Hammersmith. It was a Gothic building of yellow brick: a large hall full of desks, some small class-rooms and a separate house for boarders, all built perhaps in 1840 or 1850. I thought it an ancient building and that it had belonged to the founder of the school, Lord Godolphin, who was romantic to me because there was a novel about him. I never read the novel, but I thought only romantic people were put in books. On one side, there was a piano factory of yellow brick, upon two sides half finished rows of little shops and villas all yellow brick, and on the fourth side, outside the wall of our playing field, a brickfield of cinders and piles of half-burned yellow bricks. All the names and faces of my school-fellows have faded from me except one name without a face and the face and name of one friend, mainly no doubt because it was all so long ago, but partly because I only seem to remember things that have mixed

themselves up with scenes that have some quality to bring them again and again before the memory. For some days, as I walked homeward along the Hammersmith Road, I told myself that whatever I most cared for had been taken away. I had found a small, green-covered book given to my father by a Dublin man of science; it gave an account of the strange sea creatures the man of science had discovered among the rocks at Howth or dredged out of Dublin Bay. It had long been my favourite book; and when I read it I believed that I was growing very wise, but now I should have no time for it nor for my own thoughts. Every moment would be taken up learning or saying lessons or walking between school and home four times a day, for I came home in the middle of the day for dinner. But presently I forgot my trouble, absorbed in two things I had never known, companionship and enmity. After my first day's lesson, a circle of boys had got around me in a playing field and asked me questions, "who's your father?" "what does he do?" "how much money has he?" Presently a boy said something insulting. I had never struck anybody or been struck, and now all in a minute, without any intention upon my side, but as if I had been a doll moved by a string, I was hitting at the boys within reach and being hit. After that I was called

names for being Irish, and had many fights and never, for years, got the better of any one of them; for I was delicate and had no muscles. Sometimes, however, I found means of retaliation, even of aggression. There was a boy with a big stride, much feared by little boys, and finding him alone in the playing field, I went up to him and said, "rise upon Sugaun and sink upon Gad." "What does that mean?" he said. "Rise upon hay-leg and sink upon straw," I answered and told him that in Ireland the sergeant tied straw and hay to the ankles of a stupid recruit to show him the difference between his legs. My ears were boxed, and when I complained to my friends, they said I had brought it upon myself; and that I deserved all I got. I probably dared myself to other feats of a like sort, for I did not think English people intelligent or well-behaved unless they were artists. Everyone I knew well in Sligo despised Nationalists and Catholics, but all disliked England with a prejudice that had come down perhaps from the days of the Irish Parliament. I knew stories to the discredit of England, and took them all seriously. My mother had met some English woman who did not like Dublin because the legs of the men were too straight, and at Sligo, as everybody knew, an Englishman had once said to a car-driver, "if you

people were not so lazy, you would pull down the mountain and spread it out over the sand and that would give you acres of good fields." At Sligo there is a wide river mouth and at ebb tide most of it is dry sand, but all Sligo knew that in some way I cannot remember it was the spreading of the tide over the sand that left the narrow channel fit for shiping. At any rate the carman had gone chuckling all over Sligo with his tale. People would tell it to prove that Englishmen were always grumbling. "They grumble about their dinners and everything — there was an Englishman who wanted to pull down Knock-na-Rea" and so on. My mother had shown them to me kissing at railway stations, and taught me to feel disgust at their lack of reserve, and my father told how my grandfather, William Yeats, who had died before I was born, when he came home to his Rectory in County Down from an English visit, spoke of some man he had met on a coach road who "Englishman-like" told him all his affairs. My father explained that an Englishman generally believed that his private affairs did him credit, while an Irishman, being poor and probably in debt, had no such confidence. I, however, did not believe in this explanation. My Sligo nurses, who had in all likelihood the Irish Catholic political hatred, had never spoken well of any Englishman.

Once when walking in the town of Sligo I had turned to look after an English man and woman whose clothes attracted me. The man I remember had gray clothes and knee-breeches and the woman a gray dress, and my nurse had said contemptuously, "towrows." Perhaps before my time, there had been some English song with the burden "tow row row," and everybody had told me that English people ate skates and even dog-fish, and I myself had only just arrived in England when I saw an old man put marmalade in his porridge. I was divided from all those boys, not merely by the anecdotes that are everywhere perhaps a chief expression of the distrust of races, but because our mental images were different. I read their boys' books and they excited me, but if I read of some English victory, I did not believe that I read of my own people. They thought of Cressy and Agincourt and the Union Jack and were all very patriotic, and I, without those memories of Limerick and the Yellow Ford that would have strengthened an Irish Catholic, thought of mountain and lake, of my grandfather and of ships. Anti-Irish feeling was running high, for the Land League had been founded and landlords had been shot, and I, who had no politics, was yet full of pride, for it is romantic to live in a dangerous country.

I daresay I thought the rough manners of a cheap school, as my grandfather Yeats had those of a chance companion, typical of all England. At any rate I had a harassed life & got many a black eye and had many outbursts of grief and rage. Once a boy, the son of a great Bohemian glass-maker, and who was older than the rest of us, and had been sent out of his country because of a love affair, beat a boy for me because we were "both foreigners." And a boy, who grew to be the school athlete and my chief friend, beat a great many. His are the face and name that I remember — his name was of Huguenot origin and his face like his gaunt and lithe body had something of the American Indian in colour and lineament.

I was very much afraid of the other boys, and that made me doubt myself for the first time. When I had gathered pieces of wood in the corner for my great ship, I was confident that I could keep calm among the storms and die fighting when the great battle came. But now I was ashamed of my lack of courage; for I wanted to be like my grandfather who thought so little of danger that he had jumped overboard in the Bay of Biscay after an old hat. I was very much afraid of physical pain, and one day when I had made some noise in class, my friend the athlete was accused and I allowed him to get two

strokes of the cane before I gave myself up. He had held out his hands without flinching and had not rubbed them on his sides afterwards. I was not caned, but was made to stand up for the rest of the lesson. I suffered very much afterwards when the thought came to me, but he did not reproach me.

I had been some years at school before I had my last fight. My friend, the athlete, had given me many months of peace, but at last refused to beat any more and said I must learn to box, and not go near the other boys till I knew how. I went home with him every day and boxed in his room, and the bouts had always the same ending. My excitability gave me an advantage at first and I would drive him across the room, and then he would drive me across and it would end very commonly with my nose bleeding. One day his father, an elderly banker, brought us out into the garden and tried to make us box in a cold-blooded, courteous way, but it was no use. At last he said I might go near the boys again and I was no sooner inside the gate of the playing field than a boy flung a handful of mud and cried out "mad Irishman." I hit him several times on the face without being hit, till the boys round said we should make friends. I held out my hand in fear; for I knew if we went on I should be beaten, and he took it sullenly. I had so

poor a reputation as a fighter that it was a great disgrace to him, and even the masters made fun of his swollen face; and though some little boys came in a deputation to ask me to lick a boy they named, I had never another fight with a school-fellow. We had a great many fights with the street boys and the boys of a neighbouring charity school. We had always the better because we were not allowed to fling stones, and that compelled us to close or do our best to close. The monitors had been told to report any boy who fought in the street, but they only reported those who flung stones. I always ran at the athlete's heels, but I never hit anyone. My father considered these fights absurd, and even that they were an English absurdity, and so I could not get angry enough to like hitting and being hit; and then too my friend drove the enemy before him. He had no doubts or speculations to lighten his fist upon an enemy, that, being of low behaviour, should be beaten as often as possible, and there were real wrongs to avenge: one of our boys had been killed by the blow of a stone hid in a snowball. Sometimes we on our side got into trouble with the parents of boys. There was a quarrel between the athlete and an old German who had a barber's shop we passed every day on our way home, and one day he spat through the window and hit the German on his bald

head — the monitors had not forbidden spitting. The German ran after us, but when the athlete squared up he went away. Now, though I knew it was not right to spit at people, my admiration for my friend arose to a great height. I spread his fame over the school, and next day there was a fine stir when somebody saw the old German going up the gravel walk to the head-master's room. Presently there was such a noise in the passage that even the master had to listen. It was the head-master's red-haired brother turning the old German out and shouting to the man-servant "see that he doesn't steal the top-coats." We heard afterwards that he had asked the names of the two boys who passed his window every day and been told the names of the two head boys who passed also but were notoriously gentlemanly in their manners. Yet my friend was timid also and that restored my confidence in myself. He would often ask me to buy the sweets or the ginger-beer because he was afraid sometimes when speaking to a stranger.

I had one reputation that I valued. At first when I went to the Hammersmith swimming-baths with the other boys, I was afraid to plunge in until I had gone so far down the ladder that the water came up to my thighs; but one day when I was alone I fell from the spring-board which was five or six feet

above the water. After that I would dive from a greater height than the others and I practised swimming under water and pretending not to be out of breath when I came up. And then if I ran a race, I took care not to pant or show any sign of strain. And in this I had an advantage even over the athlete; for though he could run faster and was harder to tire than anybody else, he grew very pale and I was often paid compliments. I used to run with my friend when he was training to keep him in company. He would give me a long start and soon overtake me.

I followed the career of a certain professional runner for months, buying papers that would tell me if he had won or lost. I had seen him described as "the bright particular star of American athletics," and the wonderful phrase had thrown enchantment over him. Had he been called the particular bright star, I should have cared nothing for him. I did not understand the symptom for years after. I was nursing my own dream, my form of the common school-boy dream, though I was no longer gathering the little pieces of broken and rotting wood. Often, instead of learning my lesson, I covered the white squares of the chessboard on my little table with pen and ink pictures of myself, doing all kinds of courageous things. One day my father said "there

was a man in Nelson's ship at the battle of Trafalgar, a ship's purser, whose hair turned white; what a sensitive temperament; that man should have achieved something!" I was vexed and bewildered, and am still bewildered and still vexed, finding it a poor and crazy thing that we who have imagined so many noble persons cannot bring our flesh to heel.

VI

The head-master was a clergyman, a good-humoured, easy-going man, as temperate, one had no doubt, in his religious life as in all else, and if he ever lost sleep on our account, it was from a very proper anxiety as to our gentility. I was in disgrace once because I went to school in some brilliant blue homespun serge my mother had bought in Devonshire, and I was told I must never wear it again. He had tried several times, though he must have known it was hopeless, to persuade our parents to put us into Eton clothes, and on certain days we were compelled to wear gloves. After my first year, we were forbidden to play marbles because it was a form of gambling and was played by nasty little boys, and a few months later told not to cross our legs in class. It was a school for the sons of professional men who had failed or were at the outset of their career, and the boys held an indignation

meeting when they discovered that a new boy was an apothecary's son (I think at first I was his only friend,) and we all pretended that our parents were richer than they were. I told a little boy who had often seen my mother knitting or mending my clothes that she only mended or knitted because she liked it, though I knew it was necessity.

It was like, I suppose, most schools of its type, an obscene, bullying place, where a big boy would hit a small boy in the wind to see him double up, and where certain boys, too young for any emotion of sex, would sing the dirty songs of the street, but I daresay it suited me better than a better school. I have heard the head-master say, "how has so-and-so done in his Greek?" and the class-master reply, "very badly, but he is doing well in his cricket," and the head-master has gone away saying "Oh, leave him alone." I was unfitted for school work, and though I would often work well for weeks together, I had to give the whole evening to one lesson if I was to know it. My thoughts were a great excitement, but when I tried to do anything with them, it was like trying to pack a balloon into a shed in a high wind. I was always near the bottom of my class, and always making excuses that but added to my timidity; but no master was rough with me. I was known to collect

moths and butterflies and to get into no worse mischief than hiding now and again an old tailless white rat in my coat-pocket or my desk. There was but one interruption of our quiet habits, the brief engagement of an Irish master, a fine Greek scholar and vehement teacher, but of fantastic speech. He would open the class by saying, "there he goes, there he goes," or some like words as the head-master passed by at the end of the hall. "Of course this school is no good. How could it be with a clergyman for head-master?" And then perhaps his eye would light on me, and he would make me stand up and tell me it was a scandal I was so idle when all the world knew that any Irish boy was cleverer than a whole class-room of English boys, a description I had to pay for afterwards. Sometimes he would call up a little boy who had a girl's face and kiss him upon both cheeks and talk of taking him to Greece in the holidays, and presently we heard he had written to the boy's parents about it, but long before the holidays he was dismissed.

VII

Two pictures come into my memory. I have climbed to the top of a tree by the edge of the playing field, and am looking at my school-fellows and am as proud of myself as a March cock when it

crows to its first sunrise. I am saying to myself, "if when I grow up I am as clever among grown-up men as I am among these boys, I shall be a famous man." I remind myself how they think all the same things and cover the school walls at election times with the opinions their fathers find in the newspapers. I remind myself that I am an artist's son and must take some work as the whole end of life and not think as the others do of becoming well off and living pleasantly. The other picture is of a hotel sitting-room in the Strand, where a man is hunched up over the fire. He is a cousin who has speculated with another cousin's money and has fled from Ireland in danger of arrest. My father has brought us to spend the evening with him, to distract him from the remorse my father knows that he must be suffering.

VIII

For years Bedford Park was a romantic excitement. At North End my father had announced at breakfast that our glass chandelier was absurd and was to be taken down, and a little later he described the village Norman Shaw was building. I had thought he said, "there is to be a wall round and no newspapers to be allowed in." And when I had told him how put out I was at finding neither wall nor gate,

he explained that he had merely described what ought to be. We were to see De Morgan tiles, peacock-blue doors and the pomegranate pattern and the tulip pattern of Morris, and to discover that we had always hated doors painted with imitation grain and the roses of mid-Victoria, and tiles covered with geometrical patterns that seemed to have been shaken out of a muddy kaleidoscope. We went to live in a house like those we had seen in pictures and even met people dressed like people in the storybooks. The streets were not straight and dull as at North End, but wound about where there was a big tree or for the mere pleasure of winding, and there were wood palings instead of iron railings. The newness of everything, the empty houses where we played at hide-and-seek, and the strangeness of it all, made us feel that we were living among toys. We could imagine people living happy lives as we thought people did long ago when the poor were picturesque and the master of a house would tell of strange adventures over the sea. Only the better houses had been built. The commercial builder had not begun to copy and to cheapen, and besides we only knew the most beautiful houses, the houses of artists. My two sisters and my brother and myself had dancing lessons in a low, red-brick and tiled house that drove away dreams, long cherished, of

some day living in a house made exactly like a ship's cabin. The dining-room table, where Sinbad the sailor might have sat, was painted peacock-blue, and the woodwork was all peacock-blue and upstairs there was a window niche so big and high up, there was a flight of steps to go up and down by and a table in the niche. The two sisters of the master of the house, a well-known pre-Raphaelite painter, were our teachers, and they and their old mother were dressed in peacock-blue and in dresses so simply cut that they seemed a part of every story. Once when I had been looking with delight at the old woman, my father who had begun to be influenced by French art, muttered, "imagine dressing up your old mother like that."

My father's friends were painters who had been influenced by the pre-Raphaelite movement but had lost their confidence. Wilson, Page, Nettleship, Potter are the names I remember, and at North End, I remember them most clearly. I often heard one and another say that Rossetti had never mastered his materials, and though Nettleship had already turned lion-painter, my father talked constantly of the designs of his youth, especially of "God creating Evil," which Browning praised in a letter my father had seen "as the most sublime

conception in ancient or modern Art." In those early days, that he might not be tempted from his work by society, he had made a rent in the tail of his coat; and I have heard my mother tell how she had once sewn it up, but before he came again he had pulled out all the stitches. Potter's exquisite "Dormouse," now in the Tate Gallery, hung in our house for years. His dearest friend was a pretty model who was, when my memory begins, working for some position in a board-school. I can remember her sitting at the side of the throne in the North End Studio, a book in her hand and my father hearing her say a Latin lesson. Her face was the typical mild, oval face of the painting of that time, and may indeed have helped in the moulding of an ideal of beauty. I found it the other day drawn in pencil on a blank leaf of a volume of the "Earthly Paradise." It was at Bedford Park that I had heard Farrar, whom I had first known at Burnham Beeches, tell of Potter's death and burial. Potter had been very poor and had died from the effects of semi-starvation. He had lived so long on bread and tea that his stomach withered — I am sure that was the word used, and when his relations found out and gave him good food, it was too late. Farrar had been at the funeral and had stood behind some well-to-do people who were close about the grave

and saw one point to the model, who had followed the hearse on foot and was now crying at a distance, and say, "that is the woman who had all his money." She had often begged him to allow her to pay his debts, but he would not have it. Probably his rich friends blamed his poor friends, and they the rich, and I daresay, nobody had known enough to help him. Besides, he had a strange form of dissipation, I had heard someone say; he was devoted to children, and would become interested in some child — his "Dormouse" is a portrait of a child — and spend his money on its education. My sister remembers seeing him paint with a dark glove on his right hand, and his saying that he had used so much varnish the reflection of the hand would have teased him but for the glove. "I will soon have to paint my face some dark colour," he added. I have no memory, however, but of noticing that he sat at the easel, whereas my father always stands and walks up and down, and that there was dark blue, a colour that always affects me, in the background of his picture. There is a public gallery of Wilson's work in his native Aberdeen and my sisters have a number of his landscapes — woodscenes for the most part — painted with phlegm and melancholy, the romantic movement drawing to its latest phase.

IX

My father read out to me, for the first time, when I was eight or nine years old. Between Sligo and Rosses Point, there is a tongue of land covered with coarse grass that runs out into the sea or the mud according to the state of the tide. It is the place where dead horses are buried. Sitting there, my father read me "The Lays of Ancient Rome." It was the first poetry that had moved me after the stable-boy's "Orange Rhymes." Later on he read me "Ivanhoe" and "The Lay of the Last Minstrel," and they are still vivid in the memory. I re-read "Ivanhoe" the other day, but it has all vanished except Gurth, the swineherd, at the outset and Friar Tuck and his venison pasty, the two scenes that laid hold of me in childhood. "The Lay of the Last Minstrel" gave me a wish to turn magician that competed for years with the dream of being killed upon the sea-shore. When I first went to school, he tried to keep me from reading boys' papers, because a paper, by its very nature, as he explained to me, had to be made for the average boy or man and so could not but thwart one's growth. He took away my paper and I had not courage to say that I was but reading and delighting in a prose re-telling of the Iliad. But after a few

months, my father said he had been too anxious and became less urgent about my lessons and less violent if I had learnt them badly, and he ceased to notice what I read. From that on I shared the excitement which ran through all my fellows on Wednesday afternoons when the boys' papers were published, and I read endless stories I have forgotten as completely as Grimm's Fairy Tales that I read at Sligo, and all of Hans Andersen except the Ugly Duckling which my mother had read to me and to my sisters. I remember vaguely that I liked Hans Andersen better than Grimm because he was less homely, but even he never gave me the knights and dragons and beautiful ladies that I longed for. I have remembered nothing that I read, but only those things that I heard or saw. When I was ten or twelve my father took me to see Irving play Hamlet, and did not understand why I preferred Irving to Ellen Terry, who was, I can now see, the idol of himself and his friends. I could not think of her, as I could of Irving's Hamlet, as but myself, and I was not old enough to care for feminine charm and beauty. For many years Hamlet was an image of heroic self-possession for the poses of youth and childhood to copy, a combatant of the battle within myself. My father had read me the story of the little boy murdered by the Jews in Chaucer and the

tale of Sir Topaz, explaining the hard words, and though both excited me, I had liked Sir Topaz best and been disappointed that it left off in the middle. As I grew older, he would tell me plots of Balzac's novels, using incident or character as an illustration for some profound criticism of life. Now that I have read all the Comédie Humaine, certain pages have an unnatural emphasis, straining and overbalancing the outline, and I remember how in some suburban street, he told me of Lucien de Rubempré, or of the duel after the betrayal of his master, and how the wounded Lucien had muttered "so much the worse" when he heard someone say that he was not dead.

I now can but share with a friend my thoughts and my emotions, and there is a continual discovery of difference, but in those days, before I had found myself, we could share adventures. When friends plan and do together, their minds become one mind and the last secret disappears. I was useless at games. I cannot remember that I ever kicked a goal or made a run, but I was a mine of knowledge when I and the athlete and those two notoriously gentlemanly boys — theirs was the name that I remember without a face — set out for Richmond Park, for Coomb Wood or Twyford Abbey to look for butterflies and moths and beetles. Sometimes

to-day I meet people at lunch or dinner whose address will sound familiar and I remember of a sudden how a game-keeper chased me from the plantation behind their house, and how I have turned over the cow-dung in their paddock in the search for some rare beetle believed to haunt the spot. The athlete was our watchman and our safety. He would suggest, should we meet a carriage on the drive, that we take off our hats and walk on as though about to pay a call. And once when we were sighted by a game-keeper at Coomb Wood, he persuaded the eldest of the brothers to pretend to be a school-master taking his boys for a walk, and the keeper, instead of swearing and threatening the law, was sad and argumentative. No matter how charming the place, (and there is a little stream in a hollow where Wimbledon Common flows into Coomb Wood that is pleasant in the memory,) I knew that those other boys saw something I did not see. I was a stranger there. There was something in their way of saying the names of places that made me feel this.

X

When I arrived at the Clarence Basin, Liverpool, (the dock Clarence Mangan had his first name from) on my way to Sligo for my holidays I was among Sligo people. When I was a little boy, an old

woman who had come to Liverpool with crates of fowl, made me miserable by throwing her arms around me the moment I had alighted from my cab and telling the sailor who carried my luggage that she had held me in her arms when I was a baby. The sailor may have known me almost as well, for I was often at Sligo quay to sail my boat; and I came and went once or twice in every year upon the ss. *Sligo* or the ss. *Liverpool* which belonged to a company that had for directors my grandfather and his partner William Middleton. I was always pleased if it was the *Liverpool*, for she had been built to run the blockade during the war of North and South.

I waited for this voyage always with excitement and boasted to other boys about it, and when I was a little boy had walked with my feet apart as I had seen sailors walk. I used to be sea-sick, but I must have hidden this from the other boys and partly even from myself; for, as I look back, I remember very little about it, while I remember stories I was told by the captain or by his first mate, and the look of the great cliffs of Donegal & Tory Island men coming alongside with lobsters, talking Irish and, if it was night, blowing on a burning sod to draw our attention. The captain, an old man with square shoulders and a fringe of grey hair round his face, would tell his first mate, a very admiring man, of

fights he had had on shore at Liverpool; and perhaps it was of him I was thinking when I was very small and asked my grandmother if God was as strong as sailors. Once, at any rate, he had been nearly wrecked; the *Liverpool* had been all but blown upon the Mull of Galloway with her shaft broken, and the captain had said to his mate, "mind and jump when she strikes, for we don't want to be killed by the falling spars;" and when the mate answered, "my God, I cannot swim," he had said, "who could keep afloat for five minutes in a sea like that?" He would often say his mate was the most timid of men and that "a girl along the quays could laugh him out of anything." My grandfather had more than once given the mate a ship of his own, but he had always thrown up his berth to sail with his old captain where he felt safe. Once he had been put in charge of a ship in a dry dock in Liverpool, but a boy was drowned in Sligo, and before the news could reach him he wired to his wife, "ghost, come at once, or I will throw up berth." He had been wrecked a number of times and maybe that had broken his nerve or maybe he had a sensitiveness that would in another class have given him taste & culture. I once forgot a copy of "Count Robert of Paris" on a deck-seat, and when I found it again, it was all covered with the prints of

his dirty thumb. He had once seen the coach-a-baur or death coach. It came along the road, he said, till it was hidden by a cottage and it never came out on the other side of the cottage. Once I smelled new-mown hay when we were quite a long way from land, and once when I was watching the sea-parrots (as the sailors call the puffin) I noticed they had different ways of tucking their heads under their wings, or I fancied it, and said to the captain "they have different characters." Sometimes my father came too, and the sailors when they saw him coming would say "there is John Yeats and we shall have a storm," for he was considered unlucky.

I no longer cared for little shut-in-places, for a coppice against the stable-yard at Merville where my grandfather lived or against the gable at Seaview where Aunt Micky lived, and I began to climb the mountains, sometimes with the stable-boy for companion, and to look up their stories in the county history. I fished for trout with a worm in the mountain streams and went out herring-fishing at night: and because my grandfather had said the English were in the right to eat skates, I carried a large skate all the six miles or so from Rosses Point, but my grandfather did not eat it.

One night just as the equinoctial gales were coming when I was sailing home in the coastguard's boat a

boy told me a beetle of solid gold, strayed maybe from Poe's "gold bug," had been seen by somebody in Scotland and I do not think that either of us doubted his news. Indeed, so many stories did I hear from sailors along the wharf, or round the fo'-castle fire of the little steamer that ran between Sligo and Rosses, or from boys out fishing that the world was full of monsters and marvels. The foreign sailors wearing ear-rings did not tell me stories, but like the fishing boys, I gazed at them in wonder and admiration. When I look at my brother's picture, "Memory Harbour," houses and anchored ship and distant lighthouse all set close together as in some old map, I recognize in the blue-coated man with the mass of white shirt the pilot I went fishing with, and I am full of disquiet and of excitement, and I am melancholy because I have not made more and better verses. I have walked on Sinbad's yellow shore and never shall another hit my fancy.

I had still my red pony, and once my father came with me riding too, and was very exacting. He was indignant and threatening because he did not think I rode well. "You must do everything well," he said, "that the Pollexfens respect, though you must do other things also." He used to say the same about my lessons, and tell me to be good at mathe-

matics. I can see now that he had a sense of inferiority among those energetic, successful people. He himself, some Pollexfen told me, though he rode very badly, would go hunting upon anything and take any ditch. His father, the County Down Rector, though a courtly man and a scholar, had been so dandified a horseman that I had heard of his splitting three riding breeches before he had settled into his saddle for a day's hunting, and of his first rector exclaiming, "I had hoped for a curate but they have sent me a jockey."

Left to myself, I rode without ambition though getting many falls, and more often to Rathbroughan where my great-uncle Mat lived, than to any place else. His children and I used to sail our toy-boats in the river before his house, arming them with toy-cannon, touch-paper at all the touch-holes, always hoping but always in vain that they would not twist about in the eddies but fire their cannon at one another. I must have gone to Sligo sometimes in the Christmas holidays, for I can remember riding my red pony to a hunt. He balked at the first jump, to my relief, and when a crowd of boys began to beat him, I would not allow it. They all jeered at me for being afraid. I found a gap and when I was alone in a field tried another ditch, but the pony would not jump that either; so I tied him to a tree

and lay down among the ferns and looked up into the sky. On my way home I met the hunt again and noticed that everybody avoided the dogs, and because I wanted to find out why they did so I rode to where the dogs had gathered in the middle of the lane and stood my pony amongst them, and everybody began to shout at me.

Sometimes I would ride to Castle Dargan, where lived a brawling squireen, married to one of my Middleton cousins, and once I went thither on a visit with my cousin George Middleton. It was, I dare say, the last household where I could have found the reckless Ireland of a hundred years ago in final degradation. But I liked the place for the romance of its two ruined castles facing one another across a little lake, Castle Dargan and Castle Fury. The squireen lived in a small house whither his family had moved from their castle some time in the 18th century, and two old Miss Furys, who let lodgings in Sligo, were the last remnants of the breed of the other ruin. Once in every year he drove to Sligo for the two old women, that they might look upon the ancestral stones and remember their gentility, and he would put his wildest horses into the shafts to enjoy their terror.

He himself, with a reeling imagination, knew not what he could be at to find a spur for the heavy

hours. The first day I came there, he gave my cousin a revolver, (we were upon the high road,) and to show it off, or his own shooting, he shot a passing chicken; and half an hour later, when he had brought us to the lake's edge under his castle, now but the broken corner of a tower with a winding stair, he fired at or over an old countryman who was walking on the far edge of the lake. The next day I heard him settling the matter with the old countryman over a bottle of whiskey, and both were in good humour. Once he had asked a timid aunt of mine if she would like to see his last new pet, and thereupon had marched a race-horse in through the hall door and round the dining-room table. And once she came down to a bare table because he had thought it a good joke to open the window and let his harriers eat the breakfast. There was a current story, too, of his shooting, in the pride of his marksmanship, at his own door with a Martini-Henry rifle till he had shot the knocker off. At last he quarrelled with my great-uncle William Middleton, and to avenge himself gathered a rabble of wild country-lads and mounted them and himself upon the most broken-down rascally horses he could lay hands on and marched them through Sligo under a land-league banner. After that, having neither friends nor money, he made off to Australia or to

Canada. I fished for pike at Castle Dargan and shot at birds with a muzzle-loading pistol until somebody shot a rabbit and I heard it squeal. From that on I would kill nothing but the dumb fish.

XI

We left Bedford Park for a long thatched house at Howth, Co. Dublin. The land war was now at its height and our Kildare land, that had been in the family for many generations, was slipping from us. Rents had fallen more and more, we had to sell to pay some charge or mortgage, but my father and his tenants parted without ill-will. During the worst times an old tenant had under his roof my father's shooting-dog and gave it better care than the annual payment earned. He had set apart for its comfort the best place at the fire; and if some man were in the place when the dog walked into the house, the man must needs make room for the dog. And a good while after the sale, I can remember my father being called upon to settle some dispute between this old man and his sons.

I was now fifteen; and as he did not want to leave his painting my father told me to go to Harcourt Street and put myself to school. I found a bleak 18th century house and a small playing-field full of mud and pebbles, fenced by an iron railing from a

wide 18th century street, but opposite a long hoarding and a squalid, ornamental railway station. Here, as I soon found, nobody gave a thought to decorum. We worked in a din of voices. We began the morning with prayers, but when class began the head-master, if he was in the humour, would laugh at Church and Clergy. "Let them say what they like," he would say, "but the earth does go round the sun." On the other hand there was no bullying and I had not thought it possible that boys could work so hard. Cricket and football, the collection of moths and butterflies, though not forbidden, were discouraged. They were for idle boys. I did not know, as I used to, the mass of my schoolfellows; for we had little life in common outside the class-rooms. I had begun to think of my schoolwork as an interruption of my natural history studies, but even had I never opened a book not in the school course, I could not have learned a quarter of my night's work. I had always done Euclid easily, making the problems out while the other boys were blundering at the blackboard, and it had often carried me from the bottom to the top of my class; but these boys had the same natural gift and instead of being in the fourth or fifth book were in the modern books at the end of the primer; and in place of a dozen lines of Virgil with a diction-

ary, I was expected to learn with the help of a crib a hundred and fifty lines. The other boys were able to learn the translation off, and to remember what words of Latin and English corresponded with one another, but I, who it may be had tried to find out what happened in the parts we had not read, made ridiculous mistakes; and what could I, who never worked when I was not interested, do with a history lesson that was but a column of seventy dates? I was worst of all at literature, for we read Shakespeare for his grammar exclusively.

One day I had a lucky thought. A great many lessons were run through in the last hour of the day, things we had learnt or should have learnt by heart over night, and after not having known one of them for weeks, I cut off that hour without anybody's leave. I asked the mathematical master to give me a sum to work and nobody said a word. My father often interfered, and always with disaster, to teach me my Latin lesson. "But I have also my geography," I would say. "Geography," he would reply, "should never be taught. It is not a training for the mind. You will pick up all that you need, in your general reading." And if it was a history lesson, he would say just the same, and "Euclid," he would say, "is too easy. It comes naturally to the literary imagination. The old idea,

that it is a good training for the mind, was long ago refuted." I would know my Latin lesson so that it was a nine days' wonder, and for weeks after would be told it was scandalous to be so clever and so idle. No one knew that I had learnt it in the terror that alone could check my wandering mind. I must have told on him at some time or other for I remember the head-master saying, "I am going to give you an imposition because I cannot get at your father to give him one." Sometimes we had essays to write; & though I never got a prize, for the essays were judged by hand-writing and spelling I caused a measure of scandal. I would be called up before some master and asked if I really believed such things, and that would make me angry for I had written what I had believed all my life, what my father had told me, or a memory of the conversation of his friends. There were other beliefs, but they were held by people one did not know, people who were vulgar or stupid. I was asked to write an essay on "men may rise on stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things." My father read the subject to my mother, who had no interest in such matters. "That is the way," he said, "boys are made insincere and false to themselves. Ideals make the blood thin, and take the human nature out of people." He walked up and down the room

in eloquent indignation, and told me not to write on such a subject at all, but upon Shakespeare's lines "to thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day thou canst not then be false to any man." At another time, he would denounce the idea of duty, and "imagine," he would say, "how the right sort of woman would despise a dutiful husband;" and he would tell us how much my mother would scorn such a thing. Maybe there were people among whom such ideas were natural, but they were the people with whom one does not dine. All he said was, I now believe right, but he should have taken me away from school. He would have taught me nothing but Greek and Latin, and I would now be a properly educated man, and would not have to look in useless longing at books that have been, through the poor mechanism of translation, the builders of my soul, nor faced authority with the timidity born of excuse and evasion. Evasion and excuse were in the event as wise as the house-building instinct of the beaver.

XII

My London schoolfellow, the athlete, spent a summer with us, but the friendship of boyhood, founded upon action and adventure, was drawing to an end. He was still my superior in all physical

activity and climbed to places among the rocks that even now are uncomfortable memories, but I had begun to criticize him. One morning I proposed a journey to Lambay Island, and was contemptuous because he said we should miss our mid-day meal. We hoisted a sail on our small boat and ran quickly over the nine miles and saw on the shore a tame sea-gull, while a couple of boys, the sons of a coast-guard, ran into the water in their clothes to pull us to land, as we had read of savage people doing. We spent an hour upon the sunny shore and I said, "I would like to live here always, and perhaps some day I will." I was always discovering places where I would like to spend my whole life. We started to row home, and when dinner-time had passed for about an hour, the athlete lay down on the bottom of the boat doubled up with the gripes. I mocked at him and at his fellow-countrymen whose stomachs struck the hour as if they were clocks.

Our natural history, too, began to pull us apart. I planned some day to write a book about the changes through a twelve-month among the creatures of some hole in the rock, and had some theory of my own, which I cannot remember, as to the colour of sea-anemones : and after much hesitation, trouble and bewilderment, was hot for argument in

refutation of Adam and Noah and the Seven Days. I had read Darwin and Wallace, Huxley and Haeckel, and would spend hours on a holiday plaguing a pious geologist, who, when not at some job in Guinness's brewery, came with a hammer to look for fossils in the Howth Cliffs. "You know," I would say, "that such and such human remains cannot be less, because of the strata they were found in, than fifty thousand years old." "Oh!" he would answer, "they are an isolated instance." And once when I pressed hard my case against Ussher's chronology, he begged me not to speak of the subject again. "If I believed what you do," he said, "I could not live a moral life." But I could not even argue with the athlete who still collected his butterflies for the adventure's sake, and with no curiosity but for their names. I began to judge his intelligence, and to tell him that his natural history had as little to do with science as his collection of postage stamps. Even during my school days in London, influenced perhaps by my father, I had looked down upon the postage stamps.

XIII

Our house for the first year or so was on the top of a cliff, so that in stormy weather the spray would sometimes soak my bed at night, for I had taken

the glass out of the window, sash and all. A literary passion for the open air was to last me for a few years. Then for another year or two, we had a house overlooking the harbour where the one great sight was the going and coming of the fishing fleet. We had one regular servant, a fisherman's wife, and the occasional help of a big, red-faced girl who ate a whole pot of jam while my mother was at church and accused me of it. Some such arrangement lasted until long after the time I write of, and until my father going into the kitchen by chance found a girl, who had been engaged during a passing need, in tears at the thought of leaving our other servant, and promised that they should never be parted. I have no doubt that we lived at the harbour for my mother's sake. She had, when we were children, refused to take us to a seaside place because she heard it possessed a bathing box, but she loved the activities of a fishing village. When I think of her, I almost always see her talking over a cup of tea in the kitchen with our servant, the fisherman's wife, on the only themes outside our house that seemed of interest — the fishing people of Howth, or the pilots and fishing people of Rosses Point. She read no books, but she and the fisherman's wife would tell each other stories that Homer might have told, pleased with any moment of sudden intensity and

laughing together over any point of satire. There is an essay called "Village Ghosts" in my "Celtic Twilight" which is but a record of one such afternoon, and many a fine tale has been lost because it had not occurred to me soon enough to keep notes. My father was always praising her to my sisters and to me, because she pretended to nothing she did not feel. She would write him letters telling of her delight in the tumbling clouds, but she did not care for pictures, and never went to an exhibition even to see a picture of his, nor to his studio to see the day's work, neither now nor when they were first married. I remember all this very clearly and little after until her mind had gone in a stroke of paralysis and she had found, liberated at last from financial worry, perfect happiness feeding the birds at a London window. She had always, my father would say, intensity, and that was his chief word of praise; and once he added to the praise "no spendthrift ever had a poet for a son, though a miser might."

XIV

The great event of a boy's life is the awakening of sex. He will bathe many times a day, or get up at dawn and having stripped leap to and fro over a stick laid upon two chairs and hardly know, and never admit, that he had begun to take pleasure in

his own nakedness, nor will he understand the change until some dream discovers it. He may never understand at all the greater change in his mind.

It all came upon me when I was close upon seventeen like the bursting of a shell. Somnambulistic country-girls, when it is upon them, throw plates about or pull them with long hairs in simulation of the polter-geist, or become mediums for some genuine spirit-mischief, surrendering to their desire of the marvellous. As I look backward, I seem to discover that my passions, my loves and my despairs, instead of being my enemies, a disturbance and an attack, became so beautiful that I must be constantly alone to give them my whole attention. I notice that, for the first time as I run through my memory, what I saw when alone is more vivid than what I did or saw in company.

A herd had shown me a cave some hundred and fifty feet below the cliff path and a couple of hundred above the sea, and told me how an evicted tenant called Macrom, dead some fifteen years, had lived there many years, and shown me a rusty nail in the rock which had served perhaps to hold up some wooden protection from wind and weather. Here I stored a tin of cocoa and some biscuits, and instead of going to my bed, would slip out on warm

nights and sleep in the cave on the excuse of catching moths. One had to pass over a rocky ledge, safe enough for anyone with a fair head, yet seeming, if looked at from above, narrow and sloping; and a remonstrance from a stranger who had seen me climbing along it doubled my delight in the adventure. When however, upon a bank holiday, I found lovers in my cave, I was not content with it again till I heard of alarm among the fishing boats, because the ghost of Macrom had been seen a little before the dawn, stooping over his fire in the cave-mouth. I had been trying to cook eggs, as I had read in some book, by burying them in the earth under a fire of sticks.

At other times, I would sleep among the rhododendrons and rocks in the wilder part of the grounds of Howth Castle. After a while my father said I must stay in-doors half the night, meaning that I should get some sleep in my bed; but I, knowing that I would be too sleepy and comfortable to get up again, used to sit over the kitchen fire till half the night was gone. Exaggerated accounts spread through the school, and sometimes when I did not know a lesson some master would banter me. My interest in science began to fade away, and presently I said to myself, "it has all been a misunderstanding." I remembered how soon I tired of my

specimens, and how little I knew after all my years of collecting, and I came to believe that I had gone through so much labour because of a text, heard for the first time in St. John's Church in Sligo. I wanted to be certain of my own wisdom by copying Solomon, who had knowledge of hyssop and of tree. I still carried my green net but I began to play at being a sage, a magician or a poet. I had many idols, and now as I climbed along the narrow ledge I was Manfred on his glacier, and now I thought of Prince Athanase and his solitary lamp, but I soon chose Alastor for my chief of men and longed to share his melancholy, and maybe at last to disappear from everybody's sight as he disappeared drifting in a boat along some slow-moving river between great trees. When I thought of women they were modelled on those in my favourite poets and loved in brief tragedy, or, like the girl in "The Revolt of Islam," accompanied their lovers through all manner of wild places, lawless women without homes and without children.

XV

My father's influence upon my thoughts was at its height. We went to Dublin by train every morning, breakfasting in his studio. He had taken a large room with a beautiful 18th century mantle-piece

in a York Street tenement house, and at breakfast he read passages from the poets, and always from the play or poem at its most passionate moment. He never read me a passage because of its speculative interest, and indeed did not care at all for poetry where there was generalisation or abstraction however impassioned. He would read out the first speeches of the Prometheus Unbound, but never the ecstatic lyricism of that famous fourth act; and another day the scene where Coriolanus comes to the house of Aufidius and tells the impudent servants that his home is under the canopy. I have seen Coriolanus played a number of times since then, and read it more than once, but that scene is more vivid than the rest, and it is my father's voice that I hear and not Irving's or Benson's. He did not care even for a fine lyric passage unless one felt some actual man behind its elaboration of beauty, and he was always looking for the lineaments of some desirable, familiar life. When the spirits sang their scorn of Manfred I was to judge by Manfred's answer "O sweet and melancholy voices" that they could not, even in anger, put off their spiritual sweetness. He thought Keats a greater poet than Shelley, because less abstract, but did not read him, caring little, I think, for any of that most beautiful poetry which has come in

modern times from the influence of painting. All must be an idealisation of speech, and at some moment of passionate action or somnambulistic reverie. I remember his saying that all contemplative men were in a conspiracy to overrate their state of life, and that all writers were of them, excepting the great poets. Looking backwards, it seems to me that I saw his mind in fragments, which had always hidden connections I only now begin to discover. He disliked the Victorian poetry of ideas, and Wordsworth but for certain passages or whole poems. He described one morning over his breakfast how in the shape of the head of a Wordsworthian scholar, an old and greatly respected clergyman whose portrait he was painting, he had discovered all the animal instincts of a prize-fighter. He despised the formal beauty of Raphael, that calm which is not an ordered passion but an hypocrisy, and attacked Raphael's life for its love of pleasure and its self-indulgence. In literature he was always pre-Raphaelite, and carried into literature principles that, while the Academy was still unbroken, had made the first attack upon academic form. He no longer read me anything for its story, and all our discussion was of style.

XVI

I began to make blunders when I paid calls or visits, and a woman I had known and liked as a child told me I had changed for the worse. I had wanted to be wise and eloquent, an essay on the younger Ampère had helped me to this ambition, and when I was alone I exaggerated my blunders and was miserable. I had begun to write poetry in imitation of Shelley and of Edmund Spenser, play after play — for my father exalted dramatic poetry above all other kinds — and I invented fantastic and incoherent plots. My lines but seldom scanned, for I could not understand the prosody in the books, although there were many lines that taken by themselves had music. I spoke them slowly as I wrote and only discovered when I read them to somebody else that there was no common music, no prosody. There were, however, moments of observation; for, even when I caught moths no longer, I still noticed all that passed; how the little moths came out at sunset, and how after that there were only a few big moths till dawn brought little moths again; and what birds cried out at night as if in their sleep.

XVII

At Sligo, where I still went for my holidays, I stayed with my uncle, George Pollexfen, who had come

from Ballina to fill the place of my grandfather, who had retired. My grandfather had no longer his big house, his partner William Middleton was dead, and there had been legal trouble. He was no longer the rich man he had been, and his sons and daughters were married and scattered. He had a tall, bare house overlooking the harbour, and had nothing to do but work himself into a rage if he saw a mudlighter mismanaged or judged from the smoke of a steamer that she was burning cheap coal, and to superintend the making of his tomb. There was a Middleton tomb and a long list of Middletons on the wall, and an almost empty place for Pollexfen names, but he had said, because there was a Middleton there he did not like, "I am not going to lie with those old bones;" and already one saw his name in large gilt letters on the stone fence of the new tomb. He ended his walk at St. John's churchyard almost daily, for he liked everything neat and compendious as upon shipboard, and if he had not looked after the tomb himself the builder might have added some useless ornament. He had, however, all his old skill and nerve. I was going to Rosses Point on the little trading steamer and saw him take the wheel from the helmsman and steer her through a gap in the channel wall, and across the sand, an unheard-of-course, and at the

journey's end bring her alongside her wharf at Rosses without the accustomed zigzagging or pulling on a rope but in a single movement. He took snuff when he had a cold, but had never smoked or taken alcohol; and when in his eightieth year his doctor advised a stimulant, he replied, "no, no, I am not going to form a bad habit."

My brother had partly taken my place in my grandmother's affections. He had lived permanently in her house for some years now, and went to a Sligo school where he was always bottom of his class. My grandmother did not mind that, for she said, "he is too kind-hearted to pass the other boys." He spent his free hours going here and there with crowds of little boys, sons of pilots and sailors, as their well-liked leader, arranging donkey races or driving donkeys tandem, an occupation which requires all one's intellect because of their obstinacy. Besides he had begun to amuse everybody with his drawings; and in half the pictures he paints to-day I recognise faces that I have met at Rosses or the Sligo quays. It is long since he has lived there, but his memory seems as accurate as the sight of the eye.

George Pollexfen was as patient as his father was impetuous, and did all by habit. A well-to-do, elderly man, he lived with no more comfort than

when he had set out as a young man. He had a little house and one old general servant and a man to look after his horse, and every year he gave up some activity and found that there was one more food that disagreed with him. A hypochondriac, he passed from winter to summer through a series of woollens that had always to be weighed; for in April or May or whatever the date was he had to be sure he carried the exact number of ounces he had carried upon that date since boyhood. He lived in despondency, finding in the most cheerful news reasons of discouragement, and sighing every twenty-second of June over the shortening of the days. Once in later years, when I met him in Dublin sweating in a midsummer noon, I brought him into the hall of the Kildare Street Library, a cool and shady place, without lightening his spirits; for he but said in a melancholy voice, "how very cold this place must be in winter time." Sometimes when I had pitted my cheerfulness against his gloom over the breakfast table, maintaining that neither his talent nor his memory nor his health were running to the dregs, he would rout me with the sentence, "how very old I shall be in twenty years." Yet this inactive man, in whom the sap of life seemed to be dried away, had a mind full of pictures. Nothing had ever happened to him ex-

cept a love affair, not I think very passionate, that had gone wrong, and a voyage when a young man. My grandfather had sent him in a schooner to a port in Spain where the shipping agents were two Spaniards called O'Neill, descendants of Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, who had fled from Ireland in the reign of James I; and their Irish trade was a last remnant of the Spanish trade that had once made Galway wealthy. For some years he and they had corresponded, for they cherished the memory of their origin. In some Connaught burying ground, he had chanced upon the funeral of a child with but one mourner, a distinguished foreign-looking man. It was an Austrian count burying the last of an Irish family, long nobles of Austria, who were always carried to that half-ruined burying ground.

My uncle had almost given up hunting and was soon to give it up altogether, and he had once ridden steeple-chases and been, his horse-trainer said, the best rider in Connaught. He had certainly great knowledge of horses, for I have been told, several counties away, that at Ballina he cured horses by conjuring. He had, however, merely great skill in diagnosis, for the day was still far off when he was to give his nights to astrology and ceremonial magic. His servant, Mary Battle, who

had been with him since he was a young man, had the second sight and that, maybe, inclined him to strange studies. He would tell how more than once when he had brought home a guest without giving her notice he had found the dinner-table set for two, and one morning she was about to bring him a clean shirt, but stopped saying there was blood on the shirt-front and that she must bring him another. On his way to his office he fell, crossing over a little wall, and cut himself and bled on to the linen where she had seen the blood. In the evening, she told how surprised she had been to find when she looked again that the shirt she had thought bloody was quite clean. She could neither read nor write and her mind, which answered his gloom with its merriment, was rammed with every sort of old history and strange belief. Much of my "Celtic Twilight" is but her daily speech.

My uncle had the respect of the common people as few Sligo men have had it; he would have thought a stronger emotion an intrusion on his privacy. He gave to all men the respect due to their station or their worth with an added measure of ceremony, and kept among his workmen a discipline that had about it something of a regiment or a ship, knowing nothing of any but personal authority. If a carter, let us say, was in fault, he would not dismiss

him, but send for him and take his whip away and hang it upon the wall; and having reduced the offender, as it were, to the ranks for certain months, would restore him to his post and his whip. This man of diligence and of method, who had no enterprise but in contemplation, and claimed that his wealth, considerable for Ireland, came from a brother's or partner's talent, was the confidant of my boyish freaks and reveries. When I said to him, echoing some book I had read, that one never knew a countryside till one knew it at night, (though nothing would have kept him from his bed a moment beyond the hour) he was pleased; for he loved natural things and had learnt two cries of the lapwing, one that drew them to where he stood and one that made them fly away. And he approved, and arranged my meals conveniently, when I told him I was going to walk round Lough Gill and sleep in a wood. I did not tell him all my object, for I was nursing a new ambition. My father had read to me some passage out of "Walden," and I planned to live some day in a cottage on a little island called Innisfree, and Innisfree was opposite Slish Wood where I meant to sleep.

I thought that having conquered bodily desire and the inclination of my mind towards women and love, I should live, as Thoreau lived, seeking wis-

dom. There was a story in the county history of a tree that had once grown upon that island guarded by some terrible monster and borne the food of the gods. A young girl pined for the fruit and told her lover to kill the monster and carry the fruit away. He did as he had been told, but tasted the fruit; and when he reached the mainland where she had waited for him, was dying of its powerful virtue. And from sorrow and from remorse she too ate of it and died. I do not remember whether I chose the island because of its beauty or for the story's sake, but I was twenty-two or three before I gave up the dream.

I set out from Sligo about six in the evening, walking slowly, for it was an evening of great beauty; but though I was well into Slish Wood by bed-time, I could not sleep, not from the discomfort of the dry rock I had chosen for my bed, but from my fear of the wood-ranger. Somebody had told me, though I do not think it could have been true, that he went his round at some unknown hour. I kept going over what I should say if I was found and could not think of anything he would believe. However, I could watch my island in the early dawn and notice the order of the cries of the birds.

I came home next day unimaginably tired & sleepy, having walked some thirty miles partly over

rough and boggy ground. For months afterwards, if I alluded to my walk, my uncle's general servant (not Mary Battle, who was slowly recovering from an illness and would not have taken the liberty) would go into fits of laughter. She believed I had spend the night in a different fashion and had invented the excuse to deceive my uncle, and would say to my great embarrassment, for I was as prudish as an old maid, "and you had good right to be fatigued."

Once when staying with my uncle at Rosses Point where he went for certain months of the year, I called upon a cousin towards midnight and asked him to get his yacht out, for I wanted to find what sea birds began to stir before dawn. He was indignant and refused; but his elder sister had overheard me and came to the head of the stairs and forbade him to stir, and that so vexed him that he shouted to the kitchen for his sea-boots. He came with me in great gloom for he had people's respect, he declared, and nobody so far had said that he was mad as they said I was, and we got a very sleepy boy out of his bed in the village and set up sail. We put a trawl out, as he thought it would restore his character if he caught some fish, but the wind fell and we were becalmed. I rolled myself in the main-sail and went to sleep for I could sleep any-

where in those days. I was awakened towards dawn to see my cousin and the boy turning out their pockets for money and to rummage in my own pockets. A boat was rowing in from Roughley with fish and they wanted to buy some and would pretend they had caught it, but all our pockets were empty. It was for the poem that became fifteen years afterwards "The Shadowy Waters" that I had wanted the birds' cries, and it had been full of observation had I been able to write it when I first planned it. I had found again the windy light that moved me when a child. I persuaded myself that I had a passion for the dawn, and this passion, though mainly histrionic like a child's play, an ambitious game, had moments of sincerity. Years afterwards when I had finished "The Wanderings of Oisin," dissatisfied with its yellow and its dull green, with all that overcharged colour inherited from the romantic movement, I deliberately reshaped my style, deliberately sought out an impression as of cold light and tumbling clouds. I cast off traditional metaphors and loosened my rhythm, and recognizing that all the criticism of life known to me was alien and English, became as emotional as possible but with an emotion which I described to myself as cold. It is a natural conviction for a painter's son to believe that there may be a land-

scape symbolical of some spiritual condition that awakens a hunger such as cats feel for valerian.

XVIII

I was writing a long play on a fable suggested by one of my father's early designs. A king's daughter loves a god seen in the luminous sky above her garden in childhood, and to be worthy of him and put away mortality, becomes without pity & commits crimes, and at last, having made her way to the throne by murder, awaits the hour among her courtiers. One by one they become chilly and drop dead, for, unseen by all but her, her god is walking through the hall. At last he is at her throne's foot and she, her mind in the garden once again, dies babbling like a child.

XIX

Once when I was sailing with my cousin, the boy who was our crew talked of a music-hall at a neighbouring seaport, and how the girls there gave themselves to men, and his language was as extravagant as though he praised that courtezan after whom they named a city or the queen of Sheba herself. Another day he wanted my cousin to sail some fifty miles along the coast and put in near some cottages where he had heard there were girls

"and we would have a great welcome before us." He pleaded with excitement (I imagine that his eyes shone) but hardly hoped to persuade us, and perhaps but played with fabulous images of life and of sex. A young jockey and horse-trainer, who had trained some horses for my uncle, once talked to me of wicked England while we cooked a turkey for our Christmas dinner making it twist about on a string in front of his harness-room fire. He had met two lords in England where he had gone racing, who "always exchanged wives when they went to the Continent for a holiday." He himself had once been led into temptation and was going home with a woman, but having touched his scapular by chance, saw in a moment an angel waving white wings in the air. Presently I was to meet him no more and my uncle said he had done something disgraceful about a horse.

XX

I was climbing up a hill at Howth when I heard wheels behind me and a pony-carriage drew up beside me. A pretty girl was driving alone and without a hat. She told me her name and said we had friends in common and asked me to ride beside her. After that I saw a great deal of her and was soon in love. I did not tell her I was in love, however, be-

cause she was engaged. She had chosen me for her confidant and I learned all about her quarrels with her lover. Several times he broke the engagement off, and she would fall ill, and friends would make peace. Sometimes she would write to him three times a day, but she could not do without a confidant. She was a wild creature, a fine mimic and given to bursts of religion. I have known her to weep at a sermon, call herself a sinful woman, and mimic it after. I wrote her some bad poems and had more than one sleepless night through anger with her betrothed.

XXI

At Ballisodare an event happened that brought me back to the superstitions of my childhood. I do not know when it was, for the events of this period have as little sequence as those of childhood. I was staying with cousins at Avena house, a young man a few years older and a girl of my own age and perhaps her sister who was a good deal older. My girl cousin had often told me of strange sights she had seen at Ballisodare or Rosses. An old woman three or four feet in height and leaning on a stick had once come to the window and looked in at her, and sometimes she would meet people on the road who would say "how is so-and-so," naming some member of her family, and she would know, though she could not

explain how, that they were not people of this world. Once she had lost her way in a familiar field, and when she found it again the silver mounting on a walking-stick belonging to her brother which she carried had vanished. An old woman in the village said afterwards "you have good friends amongst them, and the silver was taken instead of you."

Though it was all years ago, what I am going to tell now must be accurate, for no great while ago she wrote out her unprompted memory of it all and it was the same as mine. She was sitting under an old-fashioned mirror reading and I was reading in another part of the room. Suddenly I heard a sound as if somebody was throwing a shower of peas at the mirror. I got her to go into the next room and rap with her knuckles on the other side of the wall to see if the sound could come from there, and while I was alone a great thump came close to my head upon the wainscot and on a different wall of the room. Later in the day a servant heard a heavy footstep going through the empty house, and that night, when I and my two cousins went for a walk, she saw the ground under some trees all in a blaze of light. I saw nothing, but presently we crossed the river and went along its edge where, they say, there was a village destroyed, I think in the wars of

the 17th century, and near an old grave-yard. Suddenly we all saw light moving over the river where there is a great rush of waters. It was like a very brilliant torch. A moment later the girl saw a man coming towards us who disappeared in the water. I kept asking myself if I could be deceived. Perhaps after all, though it seemed impossible, somebody was walking in the water with a torch. But we could see a small light low down on Knock-na-rea seven miles off, and it began to move upward over the mountain slope. I timed it on my watch and in five minutes it reached the summit, and I, who had often climbed the mountain, knew that no human footstep was so speedy.

From that on I wandered about raths and faery hills and questioned old women and old men and, when I was tired out or unhappy, began to long for some such end as True Thomas found. I did not believe with my intellect that you could be carried away body and soul, but I believed with my emotions and the belief of the country people made that easy. Once when I had crawled into the stone passage in some rath of the third Rosses, the pilot who had come with me called down the passage: "are you all right, sir?"

And one night as I came near the village of Rosses on the road from Sligo, a fire blazed up on a green

bank at my right side seven or eight feet above me, and another fire suddenly answered from Knock-na-rea. I hurried on doubting, and yet hardly doubting in my heart that I saw again the fires that I had seen by the river at Ballisodare. I began occasionally telling people that one should believe whatever had been believed in all countries and periods, and only reject any part of it after much evidence, instead of starting all over afresh and only believing what one could prove. But I was always ready to deny or turn into a joke what was for all that my secret fanaticism. When I had read Darwin and Huxley and believed as they did, I had wanted, because an established authority was upon my side, to argue with everybody.

XXII

I no longer went to the Harcourt Street school and we had moved from Howth to Rathgar. I was at the Arts schools in Kildare Street, but my father, who came to the school now and then, was my teacher. The masters left me alone, for they liked a very smooth surface and a very neat outline, and indeed understood nothing but neatness and smoothness. A drawing of the Discobolus, after my father had touched it, making the shoulder stand out with swift and broken lines, had no meaning

for them; and for the most part I exaggerated all that my father did. Sometimes indeed, out of rivalry to some student near, I too would try to be smooth and neat. One day I helped the student next me, who certainly had no artistic gifts, to make a drawing of some plaster fruit. In his gratitude he told me his history. "I don't care for art," he said. "I am a good billiard player, one of the best in Dublin; but my guardian said I must take a profession, so I asked my friends to tell me where I would not have to pass an examination, and here I am." It may be that I myself was there for no better reason. My father had wanted me to go to Trinity College and, when I would not, had said, "my father and grandfather and great-grandfather have been there." I did not tell him my reason was that I did not believe my classics or my mathematics good enough for any examination.

I had for fellow-student an unhappy "village genius" sent to Dublin by some charitable Connaught landlord. He painted religious pictures upon sheets nailed to the wall of his bedroom, a "Last Judgment" among the rest. Then there was a wild young man who would come to school of a morning with a daisy-chain hung round his neck; and George Russel, "Æ," the poet, and mystic. He did not paint the model as we tried to, for some

other image rose always before his eyes (a St. John in the Desert I remember,) and already he spoke to us of his visions. His conversation, so lucid and vehement to-day, was all but incomprehensible, though now and again some phrase would be understood and repeated. One day he announced that he was leaving the Art schools because his will was weak and the arts or any other emotional pursuit could but weaken it further.

Presently I went to the modelling class to be with certain elder students who had authority among us. Among these were John Hughes and Oliver Sheppard, well-known now as Irish sculptors. The day I first went into the studio where they worked, I stood still upon the threshold in amazement. A pretty gentle-looking girl was modelling in the middle of the room, and all the men were swearing at her for getting in their light with the most violent and fantastic oaths, and calling her every sort of name, and through it all she worked in undisturbed diligence. Presently the man nearest me saw my face and called out, "she is stone deaf, so we always swear at her and call her names when she gets in our light." In reality I soon found that everyone was kind to her, carrying her drawing-boards and the like, and putting her into the tram at the day's end. We had no scholarship, no critical knowledge of the

history of painting, and no settled standards. A student would show his fellows some French illustrated paper that we might all admire, now some statue by Rodin or Dalou and now some declamatory Parisian monument, and if I did not happen to have discussed the matter with my father I would admire with no more discrimination than the rest. That pretentious monument to Gambetta made a great stir among us. No influence touched us but that of France, where one or two of the older students had been already and all hoped to go. Of England I alone knew anything. Our ablest student had learnt Italian to read Dante, but had never heard of Tennyson or Browning, and it was I who carried into the school some knowledge of English poetry, especially of Browning who had begun to move me by his air of wisdom. I do not believe that I worked well, for I wrote a great deal and that tired me, and the work I was set to bored me. When alone and uninfluenced, I longed for pattern, for pre-Raphaelitism, for an art allied to poetry, and returned again and again to our National Gallery to gaze at Turner's Golden Bough. Yet I was too timid, had I known how, to break away from my father's style and the style of those about me. I was always hoping that my father would return to the style of his youth, and make pictures

out of certain designs now lost, that one could still find in his portfolios. There was one of an old hunchback in vague medieval dress, going through some underground place where there are beds with people in the beds; a girl half rising from one has seized his hand and is kissing it. I have forgotten its story, but the strange old man and the intensity in the girl's figure are vivid as in my childhood. There is some passage, I believe in the Bible, about a man who saved a city and went away and was never heard of again and here he was in another design, an old ragged beggar in the market-place laughing at his own statue. But my father would say: "I must paint what I see in front of me. Of course I shall really paint something different because my nature will come in unconsciously." Sometimes I would try to argue with him, for I had come to think the philosophy of his fellow-artists and himself a misunderstanding created by Victorian science, and science I had grown to hate with a monkish hate; but no good came of it, and in a moment I would unsay what I had said and pretend that I did not really believe it. My father was painting many fine portraits, Dublin leaders of the bar, college notabilities, or chance comers whom he would paint for nothing if he liked their heads; but all displeased me. In my heart I thought that only

beautiful things should be painted, and that only ancient things and the stuff of dreams were beautiful. And I almost quarrelled with my father when he made a large water-colour, one of his finest pictures and now lost, of a consumptive beggar girl. And a picture at the Hibernian Academy of cocottes with yellow faces sitting before a café by some follower of Manet's made me miserable for days, but I was happy when partly through my father's planning some Whistlers were brought over and exhibited, and did not agree when my father said: "imagine making your old mother an arrangement in gray!" I did not care for mere reality and believed that creation should be conscious, and yet I could only imitate my father. I could not compose anything but a portrait and even to-day I constantly see people as a portrait painter, posing them in the mind's eye before such and such a background. Meanwhile I was still very much of a child, sometimes drawing with an elaborate frenzy, simulating what I believed of inspiration and sometimes walking with an artificial stride in memory of Hamlet and stopping at shop windows to look at my tie gathered into a loose sailor-knot and to regret that it could not be always blown out by the wind like Byron's tie in the picture. I had as many ideas as I have now, only I did not know

how to choose from among them those that belonged to my life.

XXIII

We lived in a villa where the red bricks were made pretentious and vulgar with streaks of slate colour, and there seemed to be enemies everywhere. At one side indeed there was a friendly architect, but on the other some stupid stout woman and her family. I had a study with a window opposite some window of hers, & one night when I was writing I heard voices full of derision and saw the stout woman and her family standing in the window. I have a way of acting what I write and speaking it aloud without knowing what I am doing. Perhaps I was on my hands and knees, or looking down over the back of a chair talking into what I imagined an abyss. Another day a woman asked me to direct her on her way and while I was hesitating, being so suddenly called out of my thought, a woman from some neighbouring house came by. She said I was a poet and my questioner turned away contemptuously. Upon the other hand, the policeman and tramway conductor thought my absence of mind sufficiently explained when our servant told them I was a poet. "Oh well," said the policeman, who had been asking why I went indifferently through clean and muddy places, "if it is only the poetry that is work-

ing in his head!" I imagine I looked gaunt and emaciated, for the little boys at the neighbouring cross-road used to say when I passed by: "Oh, here is King Death again." One morning when my father was on the way to his studio, he met his landlord who had a big grocer's shop and they had this conversation: "will you tell me, sir, if you think Tennyson should have been given that peerage?" "one's only doubt is if he should have accepted it: it was a finer thing to be Alfred Tennyson." There was a silence, and then: "well, all the people I know think he should not have got it." Then, spitefully: "what's the good of poetry?" "Oh, it gives our minds a great deal of pleasure." "But wouldn't it have given your mind more pleasure if he had written an improving book?" "Oh, in that case I should not have read it." My father returned in the evening delighted with his story, but I could not understand how he could take such opinions lightly and not have seriously argued with the man. None of these people had ever seen any poet but an old white-haired man who had written volumes of easy, too-honied verse, and run through his money and gone clean out of his mind. He was a common figure in the streets and lived in some shabby neighbourhood of tenement houses where there were hens and chickens among the cobble stones. Every

morning he carried home a loaf and gave half of it to the hens and chickens, the birds, or to some dog or starving cat. He was known to live in one room with a nail in the middle of the ceiling from which innumerable cords were stretched to other nails in the walls. In this way he kept up the illusion that he was living under canvas in some Arabian desert. I could not escape like this old man from house and neighbourhood, but hated both, hearing every whisper, noticing every passing glance.

When my grandfather came for a few days to see a doctor, I was shocked to see him in our house. My father read out to him in the evening Clark Russell's "Wreck of the Grosvenor;" but the doctor forbade it, for my grandfather got up in the middle of the night and acted through the mutiny, as I acted my verse, saying the while, "yes, yes, that is the way it would all happen."

XXIV

From our first arrival in Dublin, my father had brought me from time to time to see Edward Dowden. He and my father had been college friends and were trying, perhaps, to take up again their old friendship. Sometimes we were asked to breakfast, and afterwards my father would tell me to read out one of my poems. Dowden was wise in his encour-

agement, never overpraising and never unsympathetic, and he would sometimes lend me books. The orderly, prosperous house where all was in good taste, where poetry was rightly valued, made Dublin tolerable for a while, and for perhaps a couple of years he was an image of romance. My father would not share my enthusiasm and soon, I noticed, grew impatient at these meetings. He would sometimes say that he had wanted Dowden when they were young to give himself to creative art, and would talk of what he considered Dowden's failure in life. I know now that he was finding in his friend what he himself had been saved from by the conversation of the pre-Raphaelites. "He will not trust his nature," he would say, or "he is too much influenced by his inferiors," or he would praise "Renunciants," one of Dowden's poems, to prove what Dowden might have written. I was not influenced for I had imagined a past worthy of that dark, romantic face. I took literally his verses, touched here and there with Swinburnian rhetoric, and believed that he had loved, unhappily and illicitly; and when through the practice of my art I discovered that certain images about the love of woman were the properties of a school, I but changed my fancy and thought of him as very wise.

I was constantly troubled about philosophic ques-

tions. I would say to my fellow students at the Art school, "poetry and sculpture exist to keep our passions alive;" and somebody would say, "we would be much better without our passions." Or I would have a week's anxiety over the problem: do the arts make us happier, or more sensitive and therefore more unhappy. And I would say to Hughes or Sheppard, "if I cannot be certain they make us happier I will never write again." If I spoke of these things to Dowden he would put the question away with good-humoured irony: he seemed to condescend to everybody and everything and was now my sage. I was about to learn that if a man is to write lyric poetry he must be shaped by nature and art to some one out of half-a-dozen traditional poses, and be lover or saint, sage or sensualist, or mere mocker of all life; and that none but that stroke of luckless luck can open before him the accumulated expression of the world. And this thought before it could be knowledge was an instinct.

I was vexed when my father called Dowden's irony timidity, but after many years his impression has not changed for he wrote to me but a few months ago, "it was like talking to a priest. One had to be careful not to remind him of his sacrifice." Once after breakfast Dowden read us some chapters of

the unpublished "Life of Shelley," and I who had made the "Prometheus Unbound" my sacred book was delighted with all he read. I was chilled, however, when he explained that he had lost his liking for Shelley and would not have written it but for an old promise to the Shelley family. When it was published, Matthew Arnold made sport of certain conventionalities and extravagances that were, my father and I had come to see, the violence or clumsiness of a conscientious man hiding from himself a lack of sympathy. He had abandoned too, or was about to abandon, what was to have been his master-work, "The Life of Goethe," though in his youth a lecture course at Alexandra College that spoke too openly of Goethe's loves had brought upon him the displeasure of our Protestant Archbishop of Dublin. Only Wordsworth, he said, kept, more than all, his early love.

Though my faith was shaken, it was only when he urged me to read George Eliot that I became angry and disillusioned & worked myself into a quarrel or half-quarrel. I had read all Victor Hugo's romances and a couple of Balzac's and was in no mind to like her. She seemed to have a distrust or a distaste for all in life that gives one a springing foot. Then too she knew so well how to enforce her distaste by the authority of her mid-Victorian science or by some

habit of mind of its breeding, that I, who had not escaped the fascination of what I loathed, doubted while the book lay open whatsoever my instinct knew of splendour. She disturbed me and alarmed me, but when I spoke of her to my father, he threw her aside with a phrase, "Oh, she was an ugly woman who hated handsome men and handsome women;" and he began to praise "Wuthering Heights."

Only the other day, when I got Dowden's letters, did I discover for how many years the friendship between Dowden and my father had been an antagonism. My father had written from Fitzroy Road in the sixties that the brotherhood, by which he meant the poet Edwin Ellis, Nettleship and himself, "abhorred Wordsworth;" and Dowden, not remembering that another week would bring a different mood and abhorrence, had written a pained and solemn letter. My father had answered that Dowden believed too much in the intellect and that all valuable education was but a stirring up of the emotions and had added that this did not mean excitability. "In the completely emotional man," he wrote, "the least awakening of feeling is a harmony in which every chord of every feeling vibrates. Excitement is the feature of an insufficiently emotional nature, the harsh vibrating discourse of but

one or two chords." Living in a free world accustomed to the gay exaggeration of the talk of equals, of men who talk and write to discover truth and not for popular instruction, he had already, when both men were in their twenties, decided it is plain that Dowden was a Provincial.

XXV

It was only when I began to study psychical research and mystical philosophy that I broke away from my father's influence. He had been a follower of John Stuart Mill and had grown to manhood with the scientific movement. In this he had never been of Rossetti's party who said that it mattered to nobody whether the sun went round the earth or the earth round the sun. But through this new research, this reaction from popular science, I had begun to feel that I had allies for my secret thought. Once when I was in Dowden's drawing-room a servant announced my late head-master. I must have got pale or red, for Dowden, with some ironical, friendly remark, brought me into another room and there I stayed until the visitor was gone. A few months later, when I met the head-master again I had more courage. We chanced upon one another in the street and he said, "I want you to use your influence with so-and-so, for he is giving all his time

to some sort of mysticism and he will fail in his examination." I was in great alarm, but I managed to say something about the children of this world being wiser than the children of light. He went off with a brusque "good morning." I do not think that even at that age I would have been so grandiloquent but for my alarm. He had, however, aroused all my indignation.

My new allies and my old had alike sustained me. "Intermediate examinations," which I had always refused, meant money for pupil and for teacher, and that alone. My father had brought me up never when at school to think of the future or of any practical result. I have even known him to say, "when I was young, the definition of a gentleman was a man not wholly occupied in getting on." And yet this master wanted to withdraw my friend from the pursuit of the most important of all the truths. My friend, now in his last year at school, was a show boy, and had beaten all Ireland again and again, but now he and I were reading Baron Reichenbach on Odic Force and manuals published by the Theosophical Society. We spent a good deal of time in the Kildare Street Museum passing our hands over the glass cases, feeling or believing we felt the Odic Force flowing from the big crystals. We also found pins blindfolded and read papers on our discoveries

to the Hermetic Society that met near the roof in York Street. I had, when we first made our society, proposed for our consideration that whatever the great poets had affirmed in their finest moments was the nearest we could come to an authoritative religion, and that their mythology, their spirits of water and wind were but literal truth. I had read "Prometheus Unbound" with this thought in mind and wanted help to carry my study through all literature. I was soon to vex my father by defining truth as "the dramatically appropriate utterance of the highest man." And if I had been asked to define the "highest" man, I would have said perhaps, "we can but find him as Homer found Odysseus when he was looking for a theme."

My friend had written to some missionary society to send him to the South Seas, when I offered him Renan's "Life of Christ" and a copy of "Esoteric Buddhism." He refused both, but a few days later while reading for an examination in Kildare Street Library, he asked in an idle moment for "Esoteric Buddhism" and came out an esoteric Buddhist. He wrote to the missionaries withdrawing his letter and offered himself to the Theosophical Society as a *chela*. He was vexed now at my lack of zeal, for I had stayed somewhere between the books, held there perhaps by my father's scepticism. I said,

and he thought it was a great joke though I was serious, that even if I were certain in my own mind, I did not know "a single person with a talent for conviction." For a time he made me ashamed of my world and its lack of zeal, and I wondered if his world (his father was a notorious Orange leader) where everything was a matter of belief was not better than mine. He himself proposed the immediate conversion of the other show boy, a clever little fellow, now a Dublin mathematician and still under five feet. I found him a day later in much depression. I said, "did he refuse to listen to you?" "Not at all," was the answer, "for I had only been talking for a quarter of an hour when he said he believed." Certainly those minds, parched by many examinations, were thirsty.

Sometimes a professor of Oriental Languages at Trinity College, a Persian, came to our Society and talked of the magicians of the East. When he was a little boy, he had seen a vision in a pool of ink, a multitude of spirits singing in Arabic, "woe unto those that do not believe in us." And we persuaded a Brahmin philosopher to come from London and stay for a few days with the only one among us who had rooms of his own. It was my first meeting with a philosophy that confirmed my vague speculations and seemed at once logical and boundless. Con-

sciousness, he taught, does not merely spread out its surface but has, in vision and in contemplation, another motion and can change in height and in depth. A handsome young man with the typical face of Christ, he chaffed me good-humouredly because he said I came at breakfast and began some question that was interrupted by the first caller, waited in silence till ten or eleven at night when the last caller had gone, and finished my question.

XXVI

I thought a great deal about the system of education from which I had suffered, and believing that everybody had a philosophical defence for all they did, I desired greatly to meet some school-master that I might question him. For a moment it seemed as if I should have my desire. I had been invited to read out a poem called "The Island of Statues," an arcadian play in imitation of Edmund Spenser, to a gathering of critics who were to decide whether it was worthy of publication in the College magazine. The magazine had already published a lyric of mine, the first ever printed, and people began to know my name. We met in the rooms of Mr. C. H. Oldham, now professor of Political Economy at our new University; and though Professor Bury, then a very young man, was to be the deciding voice, Mr.

Oldham had asked quite a large audience. When the reading was over and the poem had been approved I was left alone, why I cannot remember, with a young man who was, I had been told, a school-master. I was silent, gathering my courage, and he also was silent; and presently I said without anything to lead up to it, "I know you will defend the ordinary system of education by saying that it strengthens the will, but I am convinced that it only seems to do so because it weakens the impulses." Then I stopped, overtaken by shyness. He made no answer but smiled and looked surprised as though I had said, "you will say they are Persian attire; but let them be changed."

XXVII

I had begun to frequent a club founded by Mr. Oldham, and not from natural liking, but from a secret ambition. I wished to become self-possessed, to be able to play with hostile minds as Hamlet played, to look in the lion's face, as it were, with unquivering eyelash. In Ireland harsh argument which had gone out of fashion in England was still the manner of our conversation, and at this club Unionist and Nationalist could interrupt one another and insult one another without the formal and traditional restraint of public speech. Sometimes they would

change the subject & discuss Socialism, or a philosophical question, merely to discover their old passions under a new shape. I spoke easily and I thought well till some one was rude and then I would become silent or exaggerate my opinion to absurdity, or hesitate and grow confused, or be carried away myself by some party passion. I would spend hours afterwards going over my words and putting the wrong ones right. Discovering that I was only self-possessed with people I knew intimately, I would often go to a strange house where I knew I would spend a wretched hour for schooling sake. I did not discover that Hamlet had his self-possession from no schooling but from indifference and passion conquering sweetness, and that less heroic minds can but hope it from old age.

XXVIII

I had very little money and one day the toll-taker at the metal bridge over the Liffey and a gossip of his laughed when I refused the halfpenny and said "no, I will go round by O'Connell Bridge." When I called for the first time at a house in Leinster Road several middle-aged women were playing cards and suggested my taking a hand and gave me a glass of sherry. The sherry went to my head and I was impoverished for days by the loss of sixpence. My

hostess was Ellen O'Leary, who kept house for her brother John O'Leary the Fenian, the handsomest old man I had ever seen. He had been condemned to twenty years penal servitude but had been set free after five on condition that he did not return to Ireland for fifteen years. He had said to the government, "I will not return if Germany makes war on you, but I will return if France does." He and his old sister lived exactly opposite the Orange leader for whom he had a great respect. His sister stirred my affection at first for no better reason than her likeness of face and figure to the matron of my London school, a friendly person, but when I came to know her I found sister and brother alike were of Plutarch's people. She told me of her brother's life, how in his youth as now in his age, he would spend his afternoons searching for rare books among second-hand book-shops, how the Fenian organizer James Stephens had found him there and asked for his help. "I do not think you have any chance of success," he had said, "but if you never ask me to enroll anybody else I will join, it will be very good for the morals of the country." She told me how it grew to be a formidable movement, and of the arrests that followed (I believe that her own sweetheart had somehow fallen among the wreckage,) of sentences of death pronounced upon

false evidence amid a public panic, and told it all without bitterness. No fanaticism could thrive amid such gentleness. She never found it hard to believe that an opponent had as high a motive as her own and needed upon her difficult road no spur of hate.

Her brother seemed very unlike on a first hearing for he had some violent oaths, "Good God in Heaven" being one of them; and if he disliked anything one said or did, he spoke all his thought, but in a little one heard his justice match her charity. "Never has there been a cause so bad," he would say, "that it has not been defended by good men for good reasons." Nor would he overvalue any man because they shared opinions; and when he lent me the poems of Davis and the Young Irelanders, of whom I had known nothing, he did not, although the poems of Davis had made him a patriot, claim that they were very good poetry.

His room was full of books, always second-hand copies that had often been ugly and badly printed when new and had not grown to my unhistoric mind more pleasing from the dirt of some old Dublin book-shop. Great numbers were Irish, and for the first time I began to read histories and verses that a Catholic Irishman knows from boyhood. He seemed to consider politics almost wholly as a

moral discipline, and seldom said of any proposed course of action that it was practical or otherwise. When he spoke to me of his prison life he spoke of all with seeming freedom, but presently one noticed that he never spoke of hardship and if one asked him why, he would say, "I was in the hands of my enemies, why should I complain?" I have heard since that the governor of his jail found out that he had endured some unnecessary discomfort for months and had asked why he did not speak of it. "I did not come here to complain," was the answer. He had the moral genius that moves all young people and moves them the more if they are repelled by those who have strict opinions and yet have lived commonplace lives. I had begun, as would any other of my training, to say violent and paradoxical things to shock provincial sobriety, and Dowden's ironical calm had come to seem but a professional pose. But here was something as spontaneous as the life of an artist. Sometimes he would say things that would have sounded well in some heroic Elizabethan play. It became my delight to rouse him to these outbursts for I was the poet in the presence of his theme. Once when I was defending an Irish politician who had made a great outcry because he was treated as a common felon, by showing that he did it for the cause's sake, he

said, "there are things that a man must not do even to save a nation." He would speak a sentence like that in ignorance of its passionate value, and would forget it the moment after.

I met at his house friends of later life, Katharine Tynan who still lived upon her father's farm, and Dr. Hyde, still a college student who took snuff like those Mayo county people, whose stories and songs he was writing down. "Davitt wants followers by the thousand," O'Leary would say, "I only want half-a-dozen." One constant caller looked at me with much hostility, John F. Taylor, an obscure great orator. The other day in Dublin I overheard a man murmuring to another one of his speeches as I might some Elizabethan lyric that is in my very bones. It was delivered at some Dublin debate, some College society perhaps. The Lord Chancellor had spoken with balanced unemotional sentences now self-complacent, now in derision. Taylor began hesitating and stopping for words, but after speaking very badly for a little, straightened his figure and spoke as out of a dream: "I am carried to another age, a nobler court, and another Lord Chancellor is speaking. I am at the court of the first Pharaoh." Thereupon he put into the mouth of that Egyptian all his audience had listened to, but now it was spoken to the children of Israel. "If you

have any spirituality as you boast, why not use our great empire to spread it through the world, why still cling to that beggarly nationality of yours? what are its history and its works weighed with those of Egypt." Then his voice changed and sank: "I see a man at the edge of the crowd; he is standing listening there, but he will not obey;" and then with his voice rising to a cry, "had he obeyed he would never have come down the mountain carrying in his arms the tables of the Law in the language of the outlaw."

He had been in a linen-draper's shop for a while, had educated himself and put himself to college, and was now, as a lawyer, famous for hopeless cases where unsure judgment could not make things worse, and eloquence, power of cross-examination and learning might amend all. Conversation with him was always argument, and for an obstinate opponent he had such phrases as, "have you your head in a bag, sir?" and I seemed his particular aversion. As with many of the self-made men of that generation, Carlyle was his chief literary enthusiasm, supporting him, as he believed, in his contempt for the complexities and refinements he had not found in his hard life, and I belonged to a generation that had begun to call Carlyle rhetorician and demagogue. I had once seen what I had

believed to be an enraged bull in a field and had walked up to it as a test of courage to discover, just as panic fell upon me, that it was merely an irritable cow. I braved Taylor again and again, but always found him worse than my expectation. I would say, quoting Mill, "oratory is heard, poetry is overheard." And he would answer, his voice full of contempt, that there was always an audience; and yet, in his moments of lofty speech, he himself was alone no matter what the crowd.

At other times his science or his Catholic orthodoxy, I never could discover which, would become enraged with my supernaturalism. I can but once remember escaping him unabashed and unconquered. I said with deliberate exaggeration at some evening party at O'Leary's "five out of every six people have seen a ghost;" and Taylor fell into my net with "well, I will ask everybody here." I managed that the first answer should come from a man who had heard a voice he believed to be that of his dead brother, and the second from a doctor's wife who had lived in a haunted house and met a man with his throat cut, whose throat as he drifted along the garden-walk "had opened and closed like the mouth of a fish." Taylor threw up his head like an angry horse, but asked no further question, and did not return to the subject that evening. If he had

gone on he would have heard from everybody some like story though not all at first hand, and Miss O'Leary would have told him what happened at the death of one of the MacManus brothers, well known in the politics of Young Ireland. One brother was watching by the bed where the other lay dying and saw a strange hawk-like bird fly through the open window and alight upon the breast of the dying man. He did not dare to drive it away and it remained there, as it seemed, looking into his brother's eyes until death came, and then it flew out of the window. I think, though I am not sure, that she had the story from the watcher himself.

It was understood that Taylor's temper kept him from public life, though he may have been the greatest orator of his time, partly because no leader would accept him, and still more because, in the words of one of his Dublin enemies, "he had never joined any party and as soon as one joined him he seceded." With O'Leary he was always, even when they differed, as they often did, gentle and deferential, but once only, and that was years afterwards, did I think that he was about to include me among his friends. We met by chance in a London street and he stopped me with an abrupt movement: "Yeats," he said, "I have been thinking.

If you and . . . (naming another aversion,) were born in a small Italian principality in the Middle Ages, he would have friends at court and you would be in exile with a price on your head." He went off without another word, and the next time we met he was no less offensive than before. He, imprisoned in himself, and not the always unperturbed O'Leary, comes before me as the tragic figure of my youth. The same passion for all moral and physical splendour that drew him to O'Leary would make him beg leave to wear, for some few days, a friend's ring or pin, and gave him a heart that every pretty woman set on fire. I doubt if he was happy in his loves; for those his powerful intellect had fascinated were, I believe, repelled by his coarse red hair, his gaunt ungainly body, his stiff movements as of a Dutch doll, his badly rolled, shabby umbrella. And yet with women, as with O'Leary, he was gentle, deferential, almost diffident.

A Young Ireland Society met in the lecture hall of a workman's club in York Street with O'Leary for president, and there four or five university students and myself and occasionally Taylor spoke on Irish history or literature. When Taylor spoke, it was a great event, and his delivery in the course of a speech or lecture of some political verse by Thomas Davis gave me a conviction of how great might be

the effect of verse spoken by a man almost rhythm-drunk at some moment of intensity, the apex of long mounting thought. Verses that seemed when one saw them upon the page flat and empty caught from that voice, whose beauty was half in its harsh strangeness, nobility and style. My father had always read verse with an equal intensity and a greater subtlety, but this art was public and his private, and it is Taylor's voice that rings in my ears and awakens my longing when I have heard some player speak lines, "so naturally," as a famous player said to me, "that nobody can find out that it is verse at all." I made a good many speeches, more I believe as a training for self-possession than from desire of speech.

Once our debates roused a passion that came to the newspapers and the streets. There was an excitable man who had fought for the Pope against the Italian patriots and who always rode a white horse in our Nationalist processions. He got on badly with O'Leary who had told him that "attempting to oppress others was a poor preparation for liberating your own country." O'Leary had written some letter to the press condemning the "Irish-American Dynamite Party" as it was called, and defining the limits of "honourable warfare." At the next meeting, the papal soldier rose in the middle of the dis-

cussion on some other matter and moved a vote of censure on O'Leary. "I myself" he said "do not approve of bombs, but I do not think that any Irishman should be discouraged." O'Leary ruled him out of order. He refused to obey and remained standing. Those round him began to threaten. He swung the chair he had been sitting on round his head and defied everybody. However he was seized from all sides and thrown out, and a special meeting called to expel him. He wrote letters to the papers and addressed a crowd somewhere. "No Young Ireland Society," he protested, "could expel a man whose grandfather had been hanged in 1798." When the night of the special meeting came his expulsion was moved, but before the vote could be taken an excited man announced that there was a crowd in the street, that the papal soldier was making a speech, that in a moment we should be attacked. Three or four of us ran and put our backs to the door while others carried on the debate. It was an inner door with narrow glass windows at each side and through these we could see the street-door and the crowd in the street. Presently a man asked us through the crack in the door if we would as a favour "leave the crowd to the workman's club upstairs." In a couple of minutes there was a great noise of sticks and broken glass, and after that our

landlord came to find out who was to pay for the hall-lamp.

XXIX

From these debates, from O'Leary's conversation, and from the Irish books he lent or gave me has come all I have set my hand to since. I had begun to know a great deal about the Irish poets who had written in English. I read with excitement books I should find unreadable to-day, and found romance in lives that had neither wit nor adventure. I did not deceive myself, I knew how often they wrote a cold and abstract language, and yet I who had never wanted to see the houses where Keats and Shelley lived would ask everybody what sort of place Inchedony was, because Callanan had named after it a bad poem in the manner of "Childe Harold." Walking home from a debate, I remember saying to some college student "Ireland cannot put from her the habits learned from her old military civilization and from a church that prays in Latin. Those popular poets have not touched her heart, her poetry when it comes will be distinguished and lonely." O'Leary had once said to me, "neither Ireland nor England knows the good from the bad in any art, but Ireland unlike England does not hate the good when it is pointed out to her." I began to plot and scheme how one might seal with

the right image the soft wax before it began to harden. I had noticed that Irish Catholics among whom had been born so many political martyrs had not the good taste, the household courtesy and decency of the Protestant Ireland I had known, and yet Protestant Ireland had begun to think of nothing but getting on. I thought we might bring the halves together if we had a national literature that made Ireland beautiful in the memory, and yet had been freed from provincialism by an exacting criticism, an European pose. It was because of this dream when we returned to London that I made with pastels upon the ceiling of my study a map of Sligo decorated like some old map with a ship and an elaborate compass and wrote, a little against the grain, a couple of Sligo stories, one a vague echo of "Grettir the Strong," which my father had read to me in childhood, and finished with better heart my "Wanderings of Oisin," and began after ridding my style of romantic colour "The Countess Cathleen." I saw that our people did not read, but that they listened patiently (how many long political speeches have they listened to?) and saw that there must be a theatre, and if I could find the right musicians, words set to music. I foresaw a great deal that we are doing now, though never the appetite of our new middle-class for "realism," nor the great-

ness of the opposition, nor the slowness of the victory. Davis had done so much in the four years of his working life, I had thought all needful pamphleteering and speech-making could be run through at the day's end, not knowing that taste is so much more deeply rooted than opinion that even if one had school and newspaper to help, one could scarcely stir it under two generations. Then too, bred up in a studio where all things are discussed and where I had even been told that indiscretion and energy are inseparable, I knew nothing of the conservatism or of the suspicions of piety. I had planned a drama like that of Greece, and romances that were, it may be, half Hugo and half de la Motte Fouqué, to bring into the town the memories and visions of the country and to spread everywhere the history and legends of mediaeval Ireland and to fill Ireland once more with sacred places. I even planned out, and in some detail, (for those mysterious lights and voices were never long forgotten,) another Samothrace, a new Eleusis. I believed, so great was my faith, or so deceptive the precedent of Young Ireland, that I should find men of genius everywhere. I had not the conviction, as it may seem, that a people can be compelled to write what one pleases, for that could but end in rhetoric or in some educational movement but be-

lieved I had divined the soul of the people and had set my shoes upon a road that would be crowded presently.

XXX

Someone at the Young Ireland Society gave me a newspaper that I might read some article or letter. I began idly reading verses describing the shore of Ireland as seen by a returning, dying emigrant. My eyes filled with tears and yet I knew the verses were badly written — vague, abstract words such as one finds in a newspaper. I looked at the end and saw the name of some political exile who had died but a few days after his return to Ireland. They had moved me because they contained the actual thoughts of a man at a passionate moment of life, and when I met my father I was full of the discovery. We should write out our own thoughts in as nearly as possible the language we thought them in, as though in a letter to an intimate friend. We should not disguise them in any way; for our lives give them force as the lives of people in plays give force to their words. Personal utterance, which had almost ceased in English literature, could be as fine an escape from rhetoric and abstraction as drama itself. My father was indignant, almost violent, and would hear of nothing but drama. "Personal utterance was only egotism." I knew it was not,

but as yet did not know how to explain the difference. I tried from that on to write out of my emotions exactly as they came to me in life, not changing them to make them more beautiful, and to rid my syntax of all inversions and my vocabulary of literary words, and that made it hard to write at all. It meant rejecting the words or the constructions that had been used over and over because they flow most easily into rhyme and measure. Then, too, how hard it was to be sincere, not to make the emotion more beautiful and more violent or the circumstance more romantic. "If I can be sincere and make my language natural, and without becoming discursive, like a novelist, and so indiscreet and prosaic," I said to myself, "I shall, if good luck or bad luck make my life interesting, be a great poet; for it will be no longer a matter of literature at all." Yet when I re-read those early poems which gave me so much trouble, I find little but romantic convention, unconscious drama. It is so many years before one can believe enough in what one feels even to know what the feeling is.

XXXI

Perhaps a year before we returned to London, a Catholic friend brought me to a spiritualistic seance at the house of a young man who had been lately ar-

rested under a suspicion of Fenianism, but had been released for lack of evidence. He and his friends had been sitting weekly about a table in the hope of spiritual manifestation and one had developed mediumship. A drawer full of books had leaped out of the table when no one was touching it, a picture had moved upon the wall. There were some half dozen of us, and our host began by making passes until the medium fell asleep sitting upright in his chair. Then the lights were turned out, and we sat waiting in the dim light of a fire. Presently my shoulders began to twitch and my hands. I could easily have stopped them, but I had never heard of such a thing and I was curious. After a few minutes the movement became violent and I stopped it. I sat motionless for a while and then my whole body moved like a suddenly unrolled watch-spring, and I was thrown backward on the wall. I again stilled the movement and sat at the table. Everybody began to say I was a medium, and that if I would not resist some wonderful thing would happen. I remembered that my father had told me that Balzac had once desired to take opium for the experience sake, but would not because he dreaded the surrender of his will. We were now holding each other's hands and presently my right hand banged the knuckles of the woman next to me upon the

table. She laughed, and the medium, speaking for the first time, and with difficulty, out of his mesmeric sleep, said, "tell her there is great danger." He stood up and began walking round me, making movements with his hands as though he were pushing something away. I was now struggling vainly with this force which compelled me to movements I had not willed, and my movements had become so violent that the table was broken. I tried to pray, and because I could not remember a prayer, repeated in a loud voice

Of Man's first disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world and all our woe . . .
Sing, heavenly muse.

My Catholic friend had left the table and was saying a Pater Noster and Ave Maria in the corner. Presently all became still and so dark that I could not see anybody. I described it to somebody next day as like going out of a noisy political meeting on to a quiet country road. I said to myself, "I am now in a trance but I no longer have any desire to resist." But when I turned my eyes to the fireplace I could see a faint gleam of light, so I thought "no, I am not in a trance." Then I saw shapes faintly appearing in the darkness & thought, "they are

spirits;" but they were only the spiritualists and my friend at her prayers. The medium said in a faint voice, "we are through the bad spirits." I said, "will they ever come again, do you think?" and he said, "no, never again, I think," and in my boyish vanity I thought it was I who had banished them. For years afterwards I would not go to a seance or turn a table and would often ask myself what was that violent impulse that had run through my nerves? was it a part of myself — something always to be a danger perhaps; or had it come from without, as it seemed?

XXXII

I had published my first book of poems by subscription, O'Leary finding many subscribers, and a book of stories, when I heard that my grandmother was dead and went to Sligo for the funeral. She had asked to see me but by some mistake I was not sent for. She had heard that I was much about with a beautiful, admired woman and feared that I did not speak of marriage because I was poor, and wanted to say to me "women care nothing about money." My grandfather was dying also and only survived her a few weeks. I went to see him and wondered at his handsome face now sickness had refined it, and noticed that he foretold the changes in the weather

by indications of the light and of the temperature that could not have told me anything. As I sat there my old childish fear returned and I was glad to get away. I stayed with my uncle whose house was opposite where my grandfather lived, and walking home with him one day we met the doctor. The doctor said there was no hope and that my grandfather should be told, but my uncle would not allow it. He said "it would make a man mad to know he was dying." In vain the doctor pleaded that he had never known a man not made calmer by the knowledge. I listened sad and angry, but my uncle always took a low view of human nature, his very tolerance which was exceedingly great came from his hoping nothing of anybody. Before he had given way my grandfather lifted up his arms and cried out "there she is," and fell backward dead. Before he was dead, old servants of that house where there had never been noise or disorder began their small pilferings, and after his death there was a quarrel over the disposition of certain mantlepiece ornaments of no value.

XXXIII

For some months now I have lived with my own youth and childhood, not always writing indeed but thinking of it almost every day, and I am sorrowful

and disturbed. It is not that I have accomplished too few of my plans, for I am not ambitious; but when I think of all the books I have read, and of the wise words I have heard spoken, and of the anxiety I have given to parents and grandparents, and of the hopes that I have had, all life weighed in the scales of my own life seems to me a preparation for something that never happens.

Printed in the United States of America.

Y0-CYP-532